

March 11, 2022

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary of Transportation
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave., SE
Washington, DC 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

As you know, SkyWest has provided U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) formal notice that it plans to discontinue air service to 29 cities in 15 states served through the Essential Air Service (EAS) program, including North Central West Virginia Airport in Clarksburg (CKB) and Greenbrier Valley Airport in Lewisburg (LWB). Air service is absolutely critical for West Virginia, connecting our communities to the rest of the country, helping businesses export their products, and increasing tourism to our great state. I am requesting the DOT work to preserve the air service we have until another provider can be found.

For years, I have continually fought for Essential Air Service program funding which provides quality, reliable air travel, increased visitors and new economic opportunities to the Mountain State. SkyWest has been a strong partner to Clarksburg and Lewisburg since it began serving those communities in 2017 and 2018 respectively, offering global connectivity through the hubs of Chicago O'Hare and Washington Dulles. CKB and LWB have shown considerable growth, with a 66.5% increase in enplanements at CKB between 2017 and 2019, and a 133.99% increase at LWB over the same period. I understand that the company faces strong headwinds as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the pilot shortage, which has impacted regional air carriers most acutely. That's why I have worked with Marshall University to open up the Bill Noe Flight School, as well as our existing flight school at Fairmont State University.

While I understand the financial circumstances that could force SkyWest to make these difficult decisions, losing this essential service could cause irreparable harm to our communities in the state, which has been investing considerably in economic development and tourism. CKB has an annual economic impact of \$1.1 billion, and future development is estimated to double the economic impact and create more than 1,000 jobs. In 2021, CKB announced that it was initiating an ambitious \$70 million project to develop land for the airport's future terminal along with the creation of an AeroTech Park. LWB has a total economic impact of \$91 million, and it serves as the gateway the Greenbrier Hotel, one of West Virginia's most famous landmarks, as well as the Monongahela National Forest and the New River Gorge National Park & Preserve – our nation's newest National Park.

SkyWest recently renewed its EAS contracts with both airports for \$3.7 million for LWB in 2020 and \$2.99 million for CKB in 2021. Basic EAS requirements guarantee a minimum of

two round trips a day, six days a week, to a large- or medium-hub airport at each community. Given the importance of this service to Clarksburg and Lewisburg and the contractual obligations under the EAS program, I request that you use your statutory authority to “hold in” service until the Department of Transportation is able to find a replacement service and the selected air carrier begins service.

Our local communities depend upon this essential service and the growth it brings to our state. I appreciate your leadership on this critically important program and your continued commitment to serving our Nation’s local communities. If you have any questions or if my staff may be of any help, please contact Seth Gainer at (202) 228-6688.

With warmest regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joe Manchin III". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

U.S. Senator Joe Manchin III