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## Memorandum

Date: May 19, 2020

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | FAA's Contract Tower Program Staffing Standards | Project No. 20A3004A000  
Federal Aviation Administration

From: Matthew E. Hampton  
Assistant Inspector General for Aviation Audits 

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation, FAA

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In 1982, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) began a pilot program to contract for air traffic control services at five "level 1" (low-activity) control towers. Currently, the FAA Contract Tower (FCT) Program consists of 256 air traffic towers—operated by three contractors and the Air National Guard—in 46 States.

Our office has performed several audits evaluating the FCT Program since 1998. Most recently, in 2020, we reported that between fiscal years 2015 and 2018, contract towers on average used fewer resources—or had lower controller staffing levels—per aircraft handled and had a lower number and rate of safety incidents than similar FAA towers.<sup>1</sup>

The U.S. Senate Committee on Appropriations directed our office to examine FAA's policies, standards, methods, and practices for establishing staffing levels at contract towers, assess the FCT Program's ability to adjust to significant air traffic growth and local requirements, and examine FAA's relationship and coordination with its contractors.<sup>2</sup> As such, our objective is to assess FAA's approach for establishing and modifying air traffic controller staffing levels at contract towers.

We plan to begin the audit next month and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct our work at FAA Headquarters, FAA Regional Service Centers, and contract towers, and will meet with the three

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<sup>1</sup> *Contract Towers Are More Cost Effective Than Comparable FAA Towers and Have Similar Safety Records* (OIG Report Number AV2020028), April 28, 2020. OIG reports are available on our website: <https://www.oig.dot.gov/>.

<sup>2</sup> S. Rep. No. 116-109, September 19, 2019. This report accompanied S. 2520—Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Act, 2020.

contractors that operate the towers. If you have any questions, please contact me at (202) 366-0500 or Nelda Smith, Program Director, at (202) 366-2140.

cc: DOT Audit Liaison, M-1  
FAA Audit Liaison, AAE-100