



Memorandum

Date: November 17, 2020

Subject: INFORMATION: Audit Announcement | Review of FAA's Evaluation of Pilot Mental Health | Project No. 20A3008A000
Federal Aviation Administration

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

To: Director, Audit and Evaluation

In March 2012, JetBlue Airways Flight 191 was diverted after the captain's erratic behavior caused the first officer to lock the captain out of the cockpit. Later in March 2015, the copilot's deliberate action caused Germanwings Flight 9525 to crash in the Alps, killing all 150 people on board. Since 1994, there have been at least four other incidents where the suspected or confirmed cause of a passenger airplane crash was the intentional action by a pilot, involving a total of 398 fatalities.

These incidents emphasize the importance of monitoring the psychological health of aviation pilots. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) does this by requiring all commercial airline pilots to have an FAA Medical Certificate. Pilots must first complete an online application for a medical certificate, and then visit an FAA designated Aviation Medical Examiner¹ for a medical evaluation. FAA receives and processes approximately 450,000 applications annually for all classes of medical certificates.²

Concerned with issues regarding the impact of cockpit access and pilot mental health on passenger safety, Senator Dianne Feinstein requested that we review FAA's oversight of commercial airline flight deck safety and procedures and methods FAA employs to evaluate the psychological health of commercial airline pilots. We previously addressed her request to evaluate FAA's efforts to identify

¹ Aviation Medical Examiners are physicians authorized by FAA to issue pilot medical certificates on its behalf.

² In most cases, a first-class medical certificate is required for operations requiring an airline transport pilot certificate. At minimum, a second-class medical certificate is required for operations requiring a commercial pilot certificate. A third-class medical certificate is required for operations requiring a private, recreational, or student pilot certificate.

and mitigate flight deck security vulnerabilities.³ In this audit, our objectives are to assess FAA's procedures for (1) evaluating the psychological health of airline pilots and (2) mitigating potential threats to aviation safety from pilots with psychological health issues.

We plan to begin the audit in the coming weeks and will contact your audit liaison to schedule an entrance conference. We will conduct our work at FAA Headquarters and the Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI) in Oklahoma City, OK, and other locations as needed. If you have any questions, please contact me at 202-366-0500, or Marshall Jackson, Program Director, at 202-366-4274.

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

³ *FAA Has Taken Steps To Identify Flight Deck Vulnerabilities But Needs To Enhance Its Mitigation Efforts* (OIG Report No. AV2017063), June 26, 2017.