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July 29, 2025

The Honorable Bryan Bedford
Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Administrator Bedford:

I am writing to follow up on my December 5, 2024 letter regarding the Instrument Landing System Yankee (ILS-Y) approach at Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (DTW).[1] To date, I have not received a response, and the serious safety concerns I raised remain unresolved.

Despite repeated warnings from whistleblowers, investigators, and the U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC), there have been reports that indicate DTW has resumed use of the ILS-Y offset localizer procedure as of July 28, 2025. I have reviewed an internal memo outlining controller instructions for this approach, and the guidance raises more questions than it answers. The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) is knowingly reinstating an approach procedure that has been found to present unacceptable safety risks, which is deeply troubling to me.

As you know, the ILS-Y procedure was discontinued in 2015 because of its inherent risks, specifically the well-documented signal interference caused when taxiing aircraft cross critical areas. These safety issues remain unresolved, as no new information has been presented to demonstrate that the procedure is safe. There is no scenario on Runway 22R at DTW in which aircraft can avoid crossing these zones. When they do cross through the critical zone, the localizer signal is disrupted, leaving pilots on final approach with unreliable guidance at the moment when precision is most critical.

Instead of implementing safer alternatives, FAA has returned to a procedure that was deemed unsafe more than a decade ago. This decision is even more concerning given the availability of modern approaches, which are widely used nationwide and provide safer, more resilient guidance.[2] The refusal by local tower leadership to employ these alternatives unnecessarily puts both pilots and passengers at risk.

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[1] Congresswoman Debbie Dingell. *Dingell Requests Answers From FAA About Landing System Concerns At DTW.* 5 Dec. 2024. Retrieved from: https://debbiedingell.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=5355.
[2] "Guide to Aviation Approaches: Types and Technologies Explained." *Aviation Hunt*. 6 Nov. 2024. Retrieved from: https://www.aviationhunt.com/aviation-approaches/.

Since my previous correspondence, several developments have only heightened my concerns:

- The tragic January 29, 2025, mid-air collision near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (DCA) that killed 67 people, where an FAA controller was reportedly performing two critical functions simultaneously.[3]

- A growing pattern of near mid-air collisions nationwide, with independent reviews documenting an increase in close-call incidents at major airports, driven by controller staffing shortages, runway congestion, and operational strain.[4][5]

- An internal DTW memo directing that local tower positions be combined during peak arrival periods, in direct conflict with FAA staffing guidance.[6]

These facts point to systemic problems in FAA staffing, oversight, and safety culture that remain unaddressed. Further, the United States Senate and the Department of Transportation's Office of Inspector General (OIG) have both found that FAA's Office of Audit and Evaluation failed to maintain documentation, conduct impartial reviews, or implement meaningful reforms.[7][8] The OSC has been equally clear that FAA's conclusions regarding the ILS-Y procedure "do not appear reasonable."[9] These findings erode confidence in FAA's ability to ensure the highest level of safety.

In light of recent reports that the FAA has resumed use of the ILS-Y approach at DTW, I request a detailed response to the following questions by Monday, August 4, 2025:

- Please confirm whether the ILS-Y approach is currently in use at DTW, and if so, when was it reinstated and under what conditions?

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[3] Baldor, L., Copp, T., Gomez Licon, A., and Skene, L. "Midair collision kills 67 people in the deadliest US air disaster in almost a quarter century." *Associated Press*. 31 Jan. 2025. Retrieved from: https://www.ap.org/news-highlights/spotlights/2025/midair-collision-kills-67-people-in-the-deadliest-us-air-disaster-in-almost-a-quarter-century/

[4] Ember, S. and Steel, E. "Airline Close Calls Happen Far More Often Than Previously Known." *New York Times*. 21 Aug. 2023. Retrieved from: https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/08/21/business/airline-safety-close-calls.html.

[5] Shah, S. "D.C. Plane Crash Puts Spotlight on History of 'Near Misses' in the U.S." *Time*. 30 Jan. 2025. Retrieved from: https://time.com/7211750/dc-plane-crash-near-misses-faa-history/

[6] Experts note that combining positions under these conditions increases the likelihood of frequency congestion, confusion between pilots, and loss of situational awareness during simultaneous approaches.

[7] United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. *Committee Investigation Report: Aviation Safety Oversight.* Dec. 2020. Retrieved from: https://www.commerce.senate.gov/services/files/FFDA35FA-0442-465D-AC63-5634D9D3CEF6.

[8] United States Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General. *FAA's Office of Audit and Evaluation Adheres to Investigative Practice Standards but Lacks Comprehensive Standard Operating Procedures.* Report No. PT2023013. 25 Jan. 2023. Retrieved from: https://www.oig.dot.gov/library-item/39264.

[9] United States Office of Special Counsel. *Air Traffic Control OSC Letter DI-21-000698*. 3 Dec. 2024. Retrieved from: https://osc.gov/Documents/Public%20Files/FY25/DI-21-000698/OSC%20File%20No.%20DI-21-000698%3B%20Letter%20to%20the%20President_Redacted.pdf.

- What is FAA's rationale for resuming the use of the ILS-Y approach at DTW despite longstanding safety concerns and the discontinuation of weather-related mitigations previously deemed essential?

- What steps is FAA taking to address the known signal interference caused by the offset localizer antenna's placement, particularly during inclement weather or when smaller aircraft taxi through the critical area?

- What alternative configurations or modern systems, such as GPS approaches or relocating the offset localizer, are being actively evaluated and why have these alternatives not been prioritized?

- How does the FAA justify the current approach given the OSC's conclusion that the agency's findings on this matter lack adequate documentation?

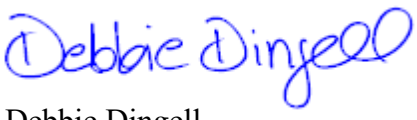
- What independent, third-party review will be undertaken immediately to assess the safety of the ILS-Y approach and determine whether it should be allowed to continue?

DTW has a strong track record as one of the nation's top-performing airports, consistently recognized with awards for its operations under a strong airport authority. As a critical hub for Michigan, the Midwest, and our national aviation network, DTW plays an essential role in keeping passengers and commerce moving safely and efficiently. That is why it is so important that flaws in FAA procedures and gaps in federal oversight are addressed quickly, so that the dedicated men and women working on the frontlines at DTW and the millions of travelers who rely on a safe, resilient air traffic control system are not put at risk.

I urge you to suspend use of the ILS-Y approach at DTW until these issues are fully addressed, and to provide a comprehensive update on the steps FAA will take to ensure that this system operates with the highest safety standards.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. I am committed to working with you to ensure that our national aviation system is safe and modern.

Sincerely,



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress