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## **DOT Announces First-Ever Bill of Rights for Passengers with Disabilities, Calls on Airlines to Seat Families Together Free of Charge**

*In its ongoing work to protect airline passengers, USDOT moves forward with pro-consumer actions*

WASHINGTON – As the busy summer travel season continues, U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg today announced actions taken by the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) to help protect airline passengers. USDOT has published the first-ever Airline Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights and issued a notice to airlines to seat young children next to a parent.

“Today’s announcements are the latest steps toward ensuring an air travel system that works for everyone,” said **U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg**. “Whether you’re a parent expecting to sit together with your young children on a flight, a traveler with a disability navigating air travel, or a consumer traveling by air for the first time in a while, you deserve safe, accessible, affordable, and reliable airline service.”

These announcements come at a time when [consumer complaints against airlines are up more than 300% above pre-pandemic levels](#).

The actions announced by the Department today include:

### **Publishing the First-Ever Bill of Rights for Airline Passengers with Disabilities**

The [Airline Passengers with Disabilities Bill of Rights](#), an easy-to-use summary of the fundamental rights of air travelers with disabilities under the Air Carrier Access Act, will empower air travelers with disabilities to understand and assert their rights, and help ensure that U.S. and foreign air carriers and their contractors uphold those rights. It was developed using feedback from the [Air Carrier Access Act Advisory Committee](#), which includes representatives of passengers with disabilities, national disability organizations, air carriers, airport operators, contractor service providers, aircraft manufacturers, wheelchair manufacturers, and a national veterans organization representing disabled veterans. The Bill of Rights provides a convenient, easy-to-use summary of existing law governing the rights of air travelers with disabilities.

### **Calling on Airlines to Seat Parents with their Children**

Today, USDOT’s Office of Aviation Consumer Protection (OACP) issued a [notice](#) urging U.S. airlines to ensure that children who are age 13 or younger are seated next to an accompanying adult with no additional charge. Although the Department receives a lower number of complaints

from consumers about family seating than some other flight issues, there continue to be complaints of instances where young children, including a child as young as 11 months, are not seated next to an accompanying adult. Later this year, OACP will initiate a review of airline policies and consumer complaints filed with the Department. If airlines' seating policies and practices are found to be barriers to a child sitting next to an adult family member or other accompanying adult family member, the Department will be prepared for potential actions consistent with its authorities.

### **Addressing Consumer Complaints and Refunds**

The latest [Air Travel Consumer Report](#), released last month, shows consumer complaints against airlines are up more than 300% above pre-pandemic levels.

Similar to 2020 and 2021, refunds continue to be the highest category of complaints received by the Department and flight problems is the second highest.

To process and investigate these voluminous complaints, USDOT increased staff handling consumer complaints by 38%. OACP has initiated investigations against more than 20 airlines for failing to provide timely refunds. One of these investigations [resulted](#) in the [highest penalty ever assessed against an airline](#).

In addition, OACP continues to monitor airline delays and cancellations to ensure airline compliance with consumer protection requirements. USDOT is considering future action in this area to better protect consumers. USDOT also intends, later this year, to issue consumer protection rulemakings on airline ticket refunds and transparency of airline ancillary fees.

Consumers may file air travel consumer or civil rights complaints with the USDOT if they believe their rights have been violated. Additional information and resources on the rights of consumers, including information on how to file a complaint, can be found [here](#).