

**WESLEY LESOSKY**

**Component President  
Air Canada Component of CUPE**



**DELIVERED VIA EMAIL**

January 14, 2021

Hon. Omar Alghabra  
Minister of Transportation

Dear Minister Alghabra,

Congratulations on your appointment to federal cabinet as Canada's new Minister of Transport. As you enter this new role, I would like to take the opportunity to bring you up to speed on issues facing Canada's flight attendants amid the ongoing COVID-19 crisis.

To begin, I am a proud flight attendant and the President of the Air Canada Component of CUPE which represents more than 9,000 flight attendants at Air Canada and Air Canada Rouge, as well as the President of the Airline Division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees – Canada's flight attendant union, which represents 15,000 flight attendants at nine airlines across Canada. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, our members have borne the brunt of this virus from both ends – thousands have lost their jobs due to the economic fallout, and many have also fallen sick while doing their jobs to bring Canadians home from abroad.

Simply put, our industry and the people who keep it in the air need your support. At the moment, approximately two out of three of my members are furloughed, wondering if there will even be an industry to return to once the pandemic dust settles.

Ours is an industry where safety is paramount, and we worry about the long-term implications of losing tens of thousands of workers who have years of training and expertise in keeping the public safe while they are 30,000 feet in the air. It may be hard for this industry to survive the pandemic, and it is going to be even harder to do that safely if we lose tens of thousands of highly trained flight attendants, pilots, air traffic controllers, aircraft technicians, and others because the federal government decided not to act when it had the chance.

We have written to your colleague, Minister Hajdu, and are still awaiting a response about the issue of immunization. We believe flight attendants clearly meet the criteria established by the federal government for early immunization. They work in an industry that is critical for connecting communities and commerce, and they cannot physically distance at work. For the sake of ensuring a safe cabin environment, we believe it is imperative that the government offer early immunization for flight attendants.

We believe it is critical for the federal government to implement pre-boarding rapid testing at airports as quickly as possible. This will not only make flying safer for both cabin crew and the flying public; it will also bring peace of mind to potential travelers and put the industry on the road to recovery. Conversely, the federal government's hasty implementation of new testing requirements for international passengers, taken without any consultation with unions representing airline workers, has already resulted in the layoff of hundreds of my members and thousands of other workers.

To be frank, the government's recent pattern of acting without consulting and ignoring the repeated concerns and pleas from workers in the airline industry will not work anymore. Our repeated attempts to engage your department and the federal government in general on critical issues for the airline industry have been almost universally ignored. To be successful in reviving this critical industry, we need more collaboration and consultation with the federal government, not less.

We believe it is long past time for the federal government to provide direct investment in the industry to help keep it afloat. While I understand that financial supports for industry are not directly under your mandate as Transport Minister, I believe it is your role to convey the strategic importance of supporting airlines within cabinet. Simply put, thousands of Canadian jobs are depending on you. Our members answered your government's call when COVID-19 struck. We now ask that you answer theirs.

I look forward to working together in the months ahead, and I would be pleased to discuss these matters with you in detail at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Wesley Lesosky  
President, Air Canada Component of CUPE &  
President, Airline Division of CUPE

cc: Air Canada Component of CUPE Executive  
Kevin Tyrrell – National Representative, CUPE National  
Air Canada Component of CUPE Membership