

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Ben Minicucci
President and Chief Executive Officer
Alaska Airlines
19300 International Blvd.
Seattle, WA 98188

Dear Mr. Minicucci:

The coronavirus pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for air travelers whose plans have been disrupted by health concerns, government-mandated bans on travel, and closed borders. Although many air travelers have had to cancel flights due to no fault of their own, many airlines have denied them the cash refunds they deserve, and are instead issuing temporary flight credits that are now beginning to expire despite the ongoing health emergency. Accordingly, we write to urge your airline to make all flight credits—including those already issued and those that have expired during the pandemic—valid indefinitely by default.¹

We must first reiterate our belief that your airline should offer a cash refund for all tickets on flights canceled during the coronavirus pandemic, whether canceled by the airline or traveler. Americans need cash in their pockets to pay for food, housing, and prescriptions during this emergency. It is unconscionable that airlines are largely refusing to return customers' money even as the industry sits on more than \$10 billion in unused travel credits.² However, even as we continue to push for these cash refunds, it is imperative that, at a minimum, your company does not subject pandemic-related flight credits to an expiration date.

Across the airline industry, current policies governing flight credit expiration are complex and can differ considerably from company to company. This patchwork creates significant confusion for consumers, some of whom are discovering their credits have already expired or will expire before they feel safe traveling again.³ For example, a number of airlines offer multiple types of flight credits, all with different restrictions and expiration dates.⁴ Because travelers are struggling to navigate these differing policies, they are now at risk of losing the billions of dollars they were effectively forced to loan to the airline industry interest-free.

¹ We understand that your company may refer to flight credits using a different term such as “travel voucher” or “travel credits.” In this letter, “flight credits” refers to any credit your company issues to customers who are unable to take their original flight during the coronavirus pandemic.

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Additionally, other conditions on flight credits vary significantly from airline to airline and can be opaque, making these credits difficult to use.⁵ For instance, some airlines allow travelers to use their flight credits across multiple trips until all the credits are depleted.⁶ For other airlines, if a traveler books a flight using flight credits and the new flight costs less than the original flight, the traveler loses the unused flight credits and the airlines pocket the residual value.⁷ Moreover, some airlines have stated that travelers cannot use certain types of flight credits to book flights operated by a partner airline even if it operated the original flight.⁸ These examples demonstrate the need to ensure your company's policies are easy for consumers to navigate so they can effectively use their credits.

In light of the ongoing pandemic and looming expiration dates for flight credits, we fear that countless consumers will be unable to redeem their flight credits or will redeem them at a loss. Worse, without removing expiration dates, your company may be encouraging travelers to fly before they feel safe boarding a plane, lest they lose tickets that they have already purchased with hard-earned dollars. We therefore respectfully request that you respond to the following questions by May 28, 2021.

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4. Will your airline commit to making all flight credits—including those that have already been issued and those that have expired during the pandemic—valid indefinitely by default? If not, why not, and what is your policy?
5. Will your airline commit to making all frequent flier miles that were unable to be redeemed during the pandemic valid indefinitely by default? If not, why not, and what is your policy?
6. Will your airline commit to making sure your flight credit policy is easy to understand and to making sure flight credits are easy to redeem?

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7. Will your airline's customers always be able to utilize the full value of their pandemic-related flight credits, no matter their replacement travel plans or other circumstances? If not, why not?
8. Will your airline's customers be able to apply their flight credits to flights operated by your airline and partner airlines? If not, will customers whose original flight was operated by a partner airline be able to use their flight credits on a flight operated by a partner airline? Please explain your answers in detail.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Maurice J. Gallagher, Jr.
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Allegiant Air
PO Box 371477
Las Vegas, NV 89137

Dear Mr. Gallagher:

The coronavirus pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for air travelers whose plans have been disrupted by health concerns, government-mandated bans on travel, and closed borders. Although many air travelers have had to cancel flights due to no fault of their own, many airlines have denied them the cash refunds they deserve, and are instead issuing temporary flight credits that are now beginning to expire despite the ongoing health emergency. Accordingly, we write to urge your airline to make all flight credits—including those already issued and those that have expired during the pandemic—valid indefinitely by default.¹

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Across the airline industry, current policies governing flight credit expiration are complex and can differ considerably from company to company. This patchwork creates significant confusion for consumers, some of whom are discovering their credits have already expired or will expire before they feel safe traveling again.³ For example, a number of airlines offer multiple types of flight credits, all with different restrictions and expiration dates.⁴ Because travelers are struggling to navigate these differing policies, they are now at risk of losing the billions of dollars they were effectively forced to loan to the airline industry interest-free.

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Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Doug Parker
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
American Airlines
1 Skyview Drive
Fort Worth, TX 76155

Dear Mr. Parker:

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Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Edward H. Bastian
Chief Executive Officer
Delta Air Lines
1030 Delta Boulevard
Atlanta, GA 30354

Dear Mr. Bastian:

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Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Barry L. Biffle
President and Chief Executive Officer
Frontier Airlines
4545 Airport Way
Denver, CO 80239

Dear Mr. Biffle:

The coronavirus pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for air travelers whose plans have been disrupted by health concerns, government-mandated bans on travel, and closed borders. Although many air travelers have had to cancel flights due to no fault of their own, many airlines have denied them the cash refunds they deserve, and are instead issuing temporary flight credits that are now beginning to expire despite the ongoing health emergency. Accordingly, we write to urge your airline to make all flight credits—including those already issued and those that have expired during the pandemic—valid indefinitely by default.¹

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Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Peter Ingram
President and Chief Executive Officer
Hawaiian Airlines
3375 Koapaka Street, G-350
Honolulu, HI 96819

Dear Mr. Ingram:

The coronavirus pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for air travelers whose plans have been disrupted by health concerns, government-mandated bans on travel, and closed borders. Although many air travelers have had to cancel flights due to no fault of their own, many airlines have denied them the cash refunds they deserve, and are instead issuing temporary flight credits that are now beginning to expire despite the ongoing health emergency. Accordingly, we write to urge your airline to make all flight credits—including those already issued and those that have expired during the pandemic—valid indefinitely by default.¹

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Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Robin Hayes
Chief Executive Officer
JetBlue Airways
27-01 Queens Plaza North
Long Island City, NY 11101

Dear Mr. Hayes:

The coronavirus pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for air travelers whose plans have been disrupted by health concerns, government-mandated bans on travel, and closed borders. Although many air travelers have had to cancel flights due to no fault of their own, many airlines have denied them the cash refunds they deserve, and are instead issuing temporary flight credits that are now beginning to expire despite the ongoing health emergency. Accordingly, we write to urge your airline to make all flight credits—including those already issued and those that have expired during the pandemic—valid indefinitely by default.¹

We must first reiterate our belief that your airline should offer a cash refund for all tickets on flights canceled during the coronavirus pandemic, whether canceled by the airline or traveler. Americans need cash in their pockets to pay for food, housing, and prescriptions during this emergency. It is unconscionable that airlines are largely refusing to return customers' money even as the industry sits on more than \$10 billion in unused travel credits.² However, even as we continue to push for these cash refunds, it is imperative that, at a minimum, your company does not subject pandemic-related flight credits to an expiration date.

Across the airline industry, current policies governing flight credit expiration are complex and can differ considerably from company to company. This patchwork creates significant confusion for consumers, some of whom are discovering their credits have already expired or will expire before they feel safe traveling again.³ For example, a number of airlines offer multiple types of flight credits, all with different restrictions and expiration dates.⁴ Because travelers are struggling to navigate these differing policies, they are now at risk of losing the billions of dollars they were effectively forced to loan to the airline industry interest-free.

¹ We understand that your company may refer to flight credits using a different term such as “travel voucher” or “travel credits.” In this letter, “flight credits” refers to any credit your company issues to customers who are unable to take their original flight during the coronavirus pandemic.

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Additionally, other conditions on flight credits vary significantly from airline to airline and can be opaque, making these credits difficult to use.⁵ For instance, some airlines allow travelers to use their flight credits across multiple trips until all the credits are depleted.⁶ For other airlines, if a traveler books a flight using flight credits and the new flight costs less than the original flight, the traveler loses the unused flight credits and the airlines pocket the residual value.⁷ Moreover, some airlines have stated that travelers cannot use certain types of flight credits to book flights operated by a partner airline even if it operated the original flight.⁸ These examples demonstrate the need to ensure your company's policies are easy for consumers to navigate so they can effectively use their credits.

In light of the ongoing pandemic and looming expiration dates for flight credits, we fear that countless consumers will be unable to redeem their flight credits or will redeem them at a loss. Worse, without removing expiration dates, your company may be encouraging travelers to fly before they feel safe boarding a plane, lest they lose tickets that they have already purchased with hard-earned dollars. We therefore respectfully request that you respond to the following questions by May 28, 2021.

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Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Gary C. Kelly
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Southwest Airlines
2702 Love Field Drive
Dallas, TX 75235

Dear Mr. Kelly:

The coronavirus pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for air travelers whose plans have been disrupted by health concerns, government-mandated bans on travel, and closed borders. Although many air travelers have had to cancel flights due to no fault of their own, many airlines have denied them the cash refunds they deserve, and are instead issuing temporary flight credits that are now beginning to expire despite the ongoing health emergency. Accordingly, we write to urge your airline to make all flight credits—including those already issued and those that have expired during the pandemic—valid indefinitely by default.¹

We must first reiterate our belief that your airline should offer a cash refund for all tickets on flights canceled during the coronavirus pandemic, whether canceled by the airline or traveler. Americans need cash in their pockets to pay for food, housing, and prescriptions during this emergency. It is unconscionable that airlines are largely refusing to return customers' money even as the industry sits on more than \$10 billion in unused travel credits.² However, even as we continue to push for these cash refunds, it is imperative that, at a minimum, your company does not subject pandemic-related flight credits to an expiration date.

Across the airline industry, current policies governing flight credit expiration are complex and can differ considerably from company to company. This patchwork creates significant confusion for consumers, some of whom are discovering their credits have already expired or will expire before they feel safe traveling again.³ For example, a number of airlines offer multiple types of flight credits, all with different restrictions and expiration dates.⁴ Because travelers are struggling to navigate these differing policies, they are now at risk of losing the billions of dollars they were effectively forced to loan to the airline industry interest-free.

¹ We understand that your company may refer to flight credits using a different term such as “travel voucher” or “travel credits.” In this letter, “flight credits” refers to any credit your company issues to customers who are unable to take their original flight during the coronavirus pandemic.

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Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Edward M. Christie III
President and Chief Executive Officer
Spirit Airlines
2800 Executive Way
Miramar, FL 33025

Dear Mr. Christie:

The coronavirus pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for air travelers whose plans have been disrupted by health concerns, government-mandated bans on travel, and closed borders. Although many air travelers have had to cancel flights due to no fault of their own, many airlines have denied them the cash refunds they deserve, and are instead issuing temporary flight credits that are now beginning to expire despite the ongoing health emergency. Accordingly, we write to urge your airline to make all flight credits—including those already issued and those that have expired during the pandemic—valid indefinitely by default.¹

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Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senator

United States Senate

May 10, 2021

Mr. Scott Kirby
Chief Executive Officer
United Airlines
233 S. Wacker Drive
Chicago, IL 60606

Dear Mr. Kirby:

The coronavirus pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for air travelers whose plans have been disrupted by health concerns, government-mandated bans on travel, and closed borders. Although many air travelers have had to cancel flights due to no fault of their own, many airlines have denied them the cash refunds they deserve, and are instead issuing temporary flight credits that are now beginning to expire despite the ongoing health emergency. Accordingly, we write to urge your airline to make all flight credits—including those already issued and those that have expired during the pandemic—valid indefinitely by default.¹

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