

21 June 2018

To: Canadian Transportation Agency
Re: Air Passenger Protection
From: Blaine H, Calgary, AB

Dear Canadian Transportation Agency,

I frequently travel for work and pleasure, and since January of 2018 to present I have been a passenger on 35 flights totally over 94,000 kilometres, and in the last three years on 135 flights and over 333,000 kilometres. I'm not your average Canadian, and I have seen my fair share of what can go wrong in the airline industry.

Recently, I was in London, UK and booked on a return flight to Canada with Westjet. My return flight happened to be on 21 May, two days after the pilot union could potentially instigate a strike action against the airline. It was vital that I return to Calgary on the 21st, as I had a mandatory work trip starting at 0600am on 24. I tweeted, and emailed Westjet to inquire about what would happen in the event of the strike and was told that I would be refunded; which is completely unacceptable! A refund, two days before travel would result in purchasing of a new ticket with the cheapest being Air Transat (who had just reinstated pilots who attempted to fly drunk after their case was dismissed in the United Kingdom, and who also caged passengers on the tarmac in Ottawa for an inhumane amount of time) for close to CAD 1,000, or other airlines for up to CAD 2,500 plus, the refund would not cover ¼ of this cost.

Thankfully I did not have to purchase a new ticket as the Pilot Union said they would not strike until after the long weekend. However, thousands of Canadians waited almost a week longer, hearing that they would only be refunded before both parties went into mediation and averted the strike.

I strongly believe that the Air Passenger Protection document should include the legal requirement for the airline to ensure that passengers reach their final destination at no expense should strike action be taken by any union which could disrupt the airline schedule, or offer a refund if the passenger requests. However, this inclusion could be skewed in favour of the union so it should be indicated that both the airline and the union would have to cover any of these related expenses 50/50. This would be an equal deterrent to both parties to avoid disruptive strikes. Limit it to only Canadian carriers should you have to, but passengers need protection in these instances.

Another aspect of the Air Passenger Protection discussion that has not covered is the handling of passengers as a result of travel disruption. I believe that there should be an outlined order of assistance that airlines must follow, for example, Unaccompanied Minors (under 16) should be the first passenger rebooked on the next available flight, followed by elderly individuals travelling alone or as a couple who require wheelchairs or medical devices. These are the two most venerable types of passengers, and I fear that their needs are not met in the chaos of a disruption; additionally, they should be assisted by individuals at the airport and should not have to call customer service to be rebooked. After these two types of passengers are assisted the airline can start helping their passengers in whatever order they see fit.

Finally, in the event of on tarmac delays, there should be the creation of a locally based passenger ombudsman who can advocate for passengers inside delayed aeroplanes at Canadian airports. The

ombudsman would be either a paid or volunteer position appointed by the airport who would be brought in once passengers have been on a plane for a pre-determined amount of time. They should be empowered with the ability to access situations on aeroplanes and make determinations in the passengers best interest first – not the airlines or the airport's interests. Pilots and flight crew should be required to provide contact information for the ombudsman at the local airport once an on tarmac delay reaches a certain point. Passengers can then inform the ombudsman about lack of water, lack of food, the need of medical assistance, and general atmosphere of the cabin so they can make informed decisions in the passenger's interest. The ombudsman should also be able to talk to all levels and types of employees at airports to determine if there are breaks in communication. The ombudsman should also have the ability to override the captain's decision to act in the passengers best interests – for example, the decision to deplane. Having someone inside the terminal working in the passengers best interests could have avoided the situations seen in Ottawa, and advocated for all individuals isolated on aeroplanes.

Thank you for taking the time to review my comments, I look forward to the Passenger Air Protection being enacted.

Kind Regards,

Blaine