

ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

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AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

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SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC GROWTH,
ENERGY POLICY, AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-1501

May 17, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary
U.S. Department of Defense
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
301 7th St SW
Washington, D.C. 20528

The Honorable Billy Nolen
Acting Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Ave SW
Washington, D.C. 20591

The Honorable Charles Sams III
Director
National Park Service
1849 C St. NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Austin, Secretary Mayorkas, Acting Administrator Nolen and Director Sams:

I write to express my concern regarding federal government helicopters in the District of Columbia disabling their Extended Squitter Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast (ADS-B) transponders for flights. This practice is a safety risk and makes it more difficult to reduce helicopter noise in D.C.

As you know, 14 CFR 91.225 requires all aircraft to have installed ADS-B equipment and operate that equipment in transmit mode at all times except when authorized by the Federal Aviation Administration when the aircraft is performing sensitive government missions and transmitting would compromise the safety of the mission, or when directed by Air Traffic Control. It is my understanding, however, that some federal government helicopters in D.C. disable their ADS-B transponders for all flights, regardless of whether they are performing a sensitive government mission.

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Flying helicopters with ADS-B transponders disabled poses a safety risk because pilots have to rely on line of sight to avoid other helicopters flying in the same area. Moreover, disabling ADS-B transponders makes it more difficult for D.C. residents to report helicopter noise, since residents may not be able to identify the agency flying the helicopter by sight.

I request that each agency addressed in this letter provide the following information in writing by May 31, 2023:

- (a) The percentage of the agency's helicopter flights in D.C. conducted with ADS-B transponders disabled.
- (b) The process used to determine whether a helicopter is performing a sensitive government mission and therefore is allowed to have its ADS-B transponder disabled.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Holmes Norton