WRITTEN SUBMISSION OF

AIR LINE PILOTS ASSOCIATION, INTERNATIONAL

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING

AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WASHINGTON, DC

APRIL 16, 2009

"FISCAL YEAR 2010 APPROPRIATIONS"

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The Air Line Pilots Association, International (ALPA) is the world's largest pilot union, representing nearly 53,000 pilots who fly for 35 airlines in the U.S. and Canada. ALPA was founded in 1931 and our motto since its beginning is "Schedule with Safety." To that end, we are pleased to have the opportunity to present testimony to the Subcommittee on a safety-critical aviation program: the Human Intervention Motivation Study or "HIMS."

Overview

The Human Intervention Motivation Study ("HIMS") is a prototype alcohol and drug assistance program, developed specifically for commercial pilots, that coordinates the identification, assessment, treatment and medical re-certification of flight officers in need of such help. It is an industry-wide effort in which companies, pilot unions, and FAA work together to preserve careers and further air safety.

Alcoholism and other chemical dependencies are now recognized as part of a disease process that can be successfully medically treated. This disease affects commercial airline pilots at no less a rate than the general population. The HIMS program was established to provide a means by which afflicted professional pilots can be identified, treated under rigorous FAA protocols and, after a successful rehabilitation, returned to the cockpit in accordance with the FAA Special Issuance Regulations (14 CRF 76.401). The program is a cooperative one that includes involvement of company representatives, pilot union peer volunteers, treatment professionals and FAA Aviation Medical Examiners. While the program borrows heavily from treatment principles developed in both clinical and industrial settings, it has specific elements that reflect the unique nature of the safety-sensitive airline transport system in North America.

Background

In the 1970s, HIMS grew out of a grant that created an alliance between the National Institute for Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA), a federal agency, and the Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA) to develop a program to address alcoholism among the airline pilot population. This grant led to the creation of a specialized peer intervention and treatment program designed specifically for professional pilots in the commercial aviation environment. After the initial NIAAA grant, education and training for the program has been funded by a series of three-year FAA contracts. Work continues under a currently funded contract which ends September 30, 2009. That contract was awarded to ALPA pursuant to the FAA's open bidding process.

Several factors prompted the creation of a pilot specific model. The experts involved in early efforts recognized that the commercial aviation environment is not well suited for a traditional on-the-job supervisory program, and determined that a pilot's ability to function effectively is best observed by other pilots.

Accordingly, a peer identification and referral system was implemented in order to identify the greatest number of pilots in need of assistance. Given the sensitive nature of a pilot's responsibilities and the interrelationship between medical and technical performance standards, it was apparent that involvement of the airline, FAA, and pilot union was essential to the success of the program. Since its inception, over 4,200 professional pilots have been successfully rehabilitated and returned to their careers.

Program Fundamentals

Peer identification and intervention are key components of this program. This approach enables pilots with substance problems to be identified by peers who are able to observe them not only in the cockpit but also on layovers and in other circumstances. It enables alcohol problems to be identified at an earlier stage than would otherwise be detected. Moreover, staged interventions involve the use of trained pilot peers working together with trained representatives of airline management. This specific intervention model is particularly efficacious and has resulted in a greater number of pilots getting evaluated and subsequently receiving needed treatment. The specialized training provided to line pilots, management officials, medical sponsors and other medical professionals is but one of the functions provided by HIMS funding.

Under the HIMS program, airlines, pilot representatives, medical professionals and the FAA have coordinated to build carrier-based employee assistance programs that identify and rehabilitate alcohol or drug-dependent pilots. The HIMS program provides educational materials and conducts seminars and outreach to the pilot community, including pilot families. HIMS coordinates the identification, treatment, medical re-certification and return to the cockpit of flight officers with substance problems – HIMS does not provide actual treatment. It is an industry-wide effort in which companies, pilot unions, and FAA work together to preserve careers and further air safety.

By any measure, the HIMS program has been a resounding success and is an example of FAA, airline, and union cooperation. The long-term success rate is nearly 90 percent. Some other vital statistics of the program as of July 2008 are:

- Over 4,200 pilots have been successfully treated and returned to the cockpit under close monitoring;

- Over 35 airlines in North America have active programs, with 8 new carriers starting programs in recent years with assistance from HIMS funding;

- On average, 120 airline pilots per year are identified, successfully treated and returned to work;

- Having such a program in effect enables air carriers who choose to pay for pilots' treatment to get a favorable return on their investment - a cost benefit analysis on one major airline showed a $9 return for every $1 spent on treatment;

- A website, http://www.himsprogram.com/, has been established through HIMS funding to provide confidential information and assistance to individual pilots, their family members and interested airline management;

- Ongoing HIMS seminars continue to train new HIMS volunteers and reinvigorate established programs;

- Internationally, HIMS has been acknowledged as the industry model and several foreign airlines, including British Airways, Air New Zealand and Cathay Pacific are being actively assisted to set up comparable programs.

In spite of these efforts, there is an ongoing need for education and assistance to air carriers interested in either starting or continuing identification, referral and treatment programs. The airline industry is under significant financial stress which can deter carriers without programs from implementing them and make existing programs more difficult to operate. Most importantly, the HIMS program is about **safety**, in addition to identifying individuals in need of medical assistance and providing economic benefit to airlines by providing a vehicle through which such highly trained employees can be rehabilitated and have their careers salvaged.

Funding

The program was started as a collaboration between ALPA and the NIAAA in 1974. In the early 1980s, when the HIMS program was successfully operating at full speed, government funding ceased during a time of substantial budget cutbacks despite a nearly 90 percent recovery rate. In the wake of this halt of federal funding it was hoped that new programs based on the HIMS model would develop locally, and that upcoming drug and alcohol testing provisions would deter alcoholism among safety-sensitive transportation employees.

With the implementation of mandatory drug and alcohol testing, the need for continuation of the HIMS program was also recognized. Consequently, in 1992, the FAA funded a resurrection of HIMS. The program received $400,000 in the FY 1992 Transportation Appropriations bill over the span of three years. It has been funded consistently since then, including $500,000 in FYs 2002 and 2005. The HIMS program is a firm-fixed price contract under the FAA's Office of Aerospace Medicine.

ALPA supports a funding level of **$600,000** for the HIMS program in FY 2010-12. This funding is critical to continue the administration of the current program. An increase in the program is proposed in order to reach a wider range of people and for training of doctors and other professionals. Funding is used to produce and distribute educational and training materials, conduct training seminars on peer identification and intervention, and provide administrative support. No appropriation has been used for the treatment or rehabilitation of drug and alcohol abuse patients.

The HIMS program was authorized in the FAA reauthorization legislation (H.R. 2881) passed by the House in 2007. Authorizing language was also included in the Senate version of that bill (S. 1300). The same HIMS language is in the FAA reauthorization bill introduced in the 111th Congress (H.R. 915).

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views on FY 2010 funding priorities. We are happy to answer any questions or more fully brief members of the subcommittee on HIMS at your convenience.