

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 17, 2021

Mr. A. Bradley Mims
Deputy Administrator
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

General Wayne Monteith
Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation
Federal Aviation Administration
800 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20591

Dear Deputy Administrator Mims and General Monteith:

I write regarding Spaceport Camden, a proposal currently pending before the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Office of Commercial Space Transportation. I understand that the FAA is currently evaluating Spaceport Camden's Launch Site Operator License application and intends to issue a final environmental impact statement (EIS) for this project this month. I am not weighing in at this time on the merits of the proposed Spaceport. Rather, I want to discuss possible shortcomings in the environmental review process.

A number of Georgians have raised concerns with me about FAA's process for engaging with the public regarding the EIS. Spaceport Camden would be located in Camden County, Georgia, immediately inland from Cumberland Island National Seashore. One of the largest protected barrier islands on the Eastern Seaboard, Cumberland Island is a jewel of the National Park System. Every year, tens of thousands of people travel from across the country to experience its pristine beaches, maritime forests, unique wildlife, and the solitude of its wilderness. Further, a number of private homes and historic sites are located on Cumberland and Little Cumberland Islands.

Spaceport Camden originally applied for a license to launch medium-large rockets across Cumberland and Little Cumberland Islands. Spaceport Camden would be the closest launch facility to populated areas ever approved by the FAA.^[1] In 2018, the FAA released a Draft EIS evaluating the environmental impacts of this facility.^[2] Spaceport Camden ultimately changed its application to focus exclusively on small rockets.

The new, small rocket application states that 20 percent of rockets launched from Spaceport Camden are expected to fail.^[3] This is a dramatic increase over the 2.5 - 6 percent failure rate disclosed to the public

^[1] February 15, 2019 Memorandum from W. Monteith (FAA Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation) to D. Elwell (FAA Acting Administrator). (See Attachment 1)

^[2] [Draft Spaceport Camden Environmental Impact Statement, Federal Aviation Administration Office of Commercial Space Transportation \(March 2018\)](#)

^[3] [Spaceport Camden Launch Site Location Review, Camden County, Georgia \(January 2020\) at Exhibit 14 \(Total probability of failure 20%\)](#)

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

in the Draft EIS.^[4] Further, the FAA has stated in the past that a rocket failure could trigger uncontrollable wildfires on Cumberland and Little Cumberland Islands.^[5] Yet the FAA did not address the risk of wildfire to the National Seashore, park visitors, wildlife, or private property in the Draft EIS. I am troubled by the FAA's 4(f) consultation with the National Park Service (NPS) as detailed in NPS's December 10, 2020 letter to FAA.^[6] It appears that NPS does not concur with FAA's 4(f) conclusions and has also been denied access to relevant documents, despite multiple requests.

In May 2020, the FAA initially stated that it would prepare a Revised Draft EIS and conduct additional public engagement regarding the small rocket application.^[7] In September 2020, the FAA announced that it would skip these steps and finalize the earlier Draft EIS. The FAA noted Executive Order 13927 (*Accelerating the Nation's Economic Recovery from the COVID-19 Emergency by Expediting Infrastructure Investments and Other Activities*) as justification for this change.^[8] President Biden, however, has since revoked EO 13927. Further, President Biden signed Executive Order 13990 (*Protecting Public Health and the Environment and Restoring Science to Tackle the Climate Crisis*), requiring the FAA to make decisions "guided by the best science and be protected by processes that ensure the integrity of Federal decision-making." Given the changes in the proposed project review processes as well as concerns raised by the NPS, I request that the FAA not rush to finalize the EIS and carefully and thoroughly evaluate the effects of this project on the local environment.

This is not the time to cut corners on environmental review or cut out public participation in the evaluation of this project. The incoming FAA leadership should be given the opportunity to evaluate fully these issues with the benefit of public input before moving forward with a final decision.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact Mara Stark-Alcalá on my staff at 202-224-3643 or at mara_s-a@warnock.senate.gov if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,



Raphael Warnock
United States Senator

^[4] *Draft Spaceport Camden Environmental Impact Statement* at 2-34. (See Attachment 2)

^[5] December 16, 2019 Letter from K. Wong (FAA) to J. Starline (Camden County) ("A launch accident may cause an uncontrollable fire on LCI or Big Cumberland Island.") (See Attachment 3)

^[6] <https://www.scribd.com/document/500317111/Spaceport-Camden-NPS-Comment-Letter-12-10-20>

^[7] May 26, 2020 Email from S. Zee (FAA) re Update on Spaceport Camden EIS – Schedule. (See Attachment 4)

^[8] September 11, 2020 Letter from W. Monteith (FAA Associate Administrator for Commercial Space Transportation) re Spaceport Camden (See Attachment 5)