FACT SHEET
alpa
Air Line Pilots Association, International • 1625 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. • Washington, D.C. 20036

The FAA Age 60 Rule

Origin: In 1959, the FAA implemented its mandatory retirement rule, which pertains to pilots operating under Part 121 of the Federal Aviation Regulations, the FAA regulations that govern the operation of scheduled airlines. The rule precludes pilots from taking part in Part 121 operations once they reach age 60. The FAA created the rule for reasons of safety, arguing that physical and mental abilities decline with age.

ALPA has supported the Age 60 rule for more than 25 years.

Opposition: Numerous challenges to the rule have occurred since its inception. Any change to the rule could only come about as the result of the FAA amending the rule, or through an Act of Congress. Given its previous support for the Age 60 rule, the FAA is unlikely to change the rule on its own. A number of legislative proposals seeking a change to the rule have been introduced in Congress over the years, however none have ever been successfully passed into law.

Science: Various medical studies have considered the age issue since the FAA first adopted the Age 60 rule. A study by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) generally supported the FAA position, although the study did not identify a specific age at which a decline in pilot performance posed the greatest risk. Studies conducted by the Civil Aerospace Medical Institute (CAMI) concluded that no relationship exists between accident/incident rate and pilot age, but a recent review of those studies by CAMI questioned the original methods and assumptions used. A third study commissioned by the FAA, which looked at accident rates as a function of age, concluded that the FAA could cautiously raise the age limit to 63. However, the FAA believed that the study had substantial flaws, and never adopted the recommendation.

ALPA Review: ALPA recently reexamined its support of the Age 60 rule. In September 2004, the ALPA Executive Board voted to begin a thorough communications effort to educate its members about the rationale for the FAA's Age 60 rule, ALPA's policy regarding the rule, and the possible implications of increasing the mandatory retirement age. The Board also directed ALPA's president, Capt. Duane Woerth, to conduct a poll of its members to determine their views regarding the issue.

Pilot Survey: In May 2005, the ALPA Executive Board received the results of the poll. The polling data indicated that 56 percent of ALPA pilots oppose a change to the rule, while 42 percent support a change. The polling results are accurate to within a 1 percent margin of error. In response to the poll, ALPA's Executive Board (the pilot chairmen from each of ALPA's 41 pilot groups) unanimously renewed its support for the Age 60 rule, and has urged members of Congress to oppose any legislation that seeks to change it.

Visit ALPA on the internet at www.alpa.org