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Hey, Congress! Let's make sure those who are sick don't fly!

Airlines compel the sick to fly by charging exorbitant change and cancellation fees plus fare increases

(Arlington, VA, March 26, 2020) The massive bill just passed by Congress giving billions to the airlines fails to require them to allow sick passengers to change their flights unless they pay exorbitant change and cancellation fees and fare increases. This action by the airline ensures that sick people will fly no matter what and serious illnesses like the coronavirus will continue to spread.

“The 883-page ‘Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act’ contains not a word about stopping the spread of the COVID-19 virus and other diseases,” says Charles Leocha, President of Travelers United. “Passengers are now, in essence, forced to fly on planes when sick by the airlines, which is one of the big reasons the coronavirus spread.

“Please, Congress,” adds Leocha, “before putting your stamp of approval on this bill, make the airlines add the rules that will help to stop the spread of this virus and other contagious diseases in the future.”

Adding one sentence is all that is needed.

Adding this one sentence is all that's needed:

Airlines will establish rules and publish them in their contracts of carriage that will allow sick passengers with a note from a doctor to change or cancel flights without additional fees or costs.

These are not new topics. Consumer groups have discussed these with DOT and Congress during the writing process of the massive bill just passed. Plus, we have been talking to airlines, to no avail, for years. Here's what is needed for immediate and positive change:

- Stop sick passengers from flying. Force airlines to end change and cancellations fees and make those changes permanent.

- During this national emergency, tickets on all canceled flights must be refunded in cash. This means both flights/trips canceled by airlines and passengers.
- Hold to account airlines that have told passengers that they can only get credit for flights canceled by the airlines.
- Airlines should be required to maintain minimal social distancing during flights.

Today, airline rules require sick passengers to pay extra to change flights or cancel reservations.

The contract of carriage for travelers on airlines requires them to pay extra to fly or cancel a flight if they are sick – even with coronavirus – and the airlines are not inclined to change anything as they flaunt rules during this pandemic.

- Airline contracts of carriage will force many sick passengers to fly.
- Airlines are breaking their own rules regarding refunds.
- The bill in all of its 883 pages does not mention restricting coronavirus infected passengers from flying.
- The CDC website does not deal with flying while infected by COVID-19.
- DOT “FlyRights” website does not mention what to do when a passenger is sick.

“Congress, now is the time to make the airlines add **rules** in their contracts of carriage **that will help stop the spread of COVID-19** and other diseases,” **says Leocha**. “The airlines certainly won’t do it on their own despite the many reasons they should.”

Before the House approves the action of the Senate, they should insist that the sick (with a doctor’s note), whether ill with the flu, pneumonia, or the coronavirus (COVID-19), will not be forced to fly and that they can cancel and change flights with no added fees and a full cash refund if desired by the passenger.

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