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### US Federal Update

**FAA Leadership Changes Come amid Passenger Jet, Helicopter Collision near KDCA**

#### *Summary of Facts*

**The devastating midair collision between a passenger jet and a helicopter near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport (KDCA) on Jan. 29 comes at a time of major leadership changes within the federal aviation sector.** Just hours after his confirmation, newly appointed US Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy took swift action, attending FAA briefings and visiting the crash site.

The tragedy comes slightly one week after FAA Administrator Michael Whitaker resigned, on Jan. 20, leaving the agency without a Senate-confirmed leader. On Jan. 30, shortly after the crash, President Donald Trump appointed Deputy Administrator Chris Rocheleau acting FAA administrator to ensure stability during this critical period.

Prior to this role, Rocheleau served as the COO for the National Business Aviation Association (NBAA), where he oversaw aircraft and flight department operations as well as administrative, financial, and human resources functions. Before joining the NBAA,

Rocheleau dedicated over 20 years to the FAA in various capacities, including as acting associate administrator for aviation safety.

### *VAI Position and Actions*

**As authorities investigate the midair collision near KDCA, the vertical aviation community mourns the tragic loss of life.** On behalf of Vertical Aviation International, we extend our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones affected. We stand with emergency responders and all those involved in the response efforts.

## State and Local Updates

### Key Aviation Bills Mark Launch of 2025 State Legislature Sessions

#### *Summary of Facts*

**With all 50 state legislatures in session this year, legislative activity related to vertical aviation is at a peak.** While some legislatures convened in January, others are beginning in February, bringing a surge of new bills impacting conventional rotorcraft, drones, advanced air mobility, and aviation fuels, including those addressing:

- **Unmanned aircraft systems:** In response to last year's New Jersey drone sightings, multiple states have introduced bills aimed at strengthening the state oversight and safety of drones.
- **Helicopters:** Several states are reintroducing previously contested helicopter-related bills that VAI opposes due to conflicts with federal preemption.
- **Aviation fuels and sustainability:** A growing number of bills propose state incentives to slowly phase out leaded aviation fuels and promote unleaded and sustainable aviation fuels.

#### *Key State Bills Introduced in January*

##### *Hawaii: H.B.810*

**Summary of facts:** Establishes a private right of action allowing individuals to sue helicopter owners or operators for alleged violations of the Federal Aviation Act and existing federal laws.

**Industry impact:** This bill is a major concern as it conflicts with federal preemption, which grants the FAA exclusive authority over aviation regulations. If passed, it could lead to frivolous lawsuits, increased legal costs, and operational uncertainties for helicopter operators in Hawaii.

##### *Hawaii: S.B.1197*

**Summary of facts:** Requires tour aircraft operators at state-controlled airports to maintain a certain amount of liability insurance coverage.

**Industry impact:** This proposal is preempted by federal law. Only the FAA can set requirements for the operation of aircraft, including insurance requirements.

#### *New York: A.00540*

**Summary of facts:** Requires helicopters to be equipped with flight recorders, cockpit voice recorders, and terrain awareness and warning systems.

**Industry impact:** The bill violates federal preemption by mandating specific equipment.

#### *New York: A.02583 and S.1140*

**Summary of facts:** Establishes a tax on noise from nonessential helicopter and seaplane flights in cities with a population of 1 million or more.

**Industry impact:** This bill would harm helicopter operators in New York by increasing operating costs. It would also set a harmful precedent for other states considering similar regulations, restricting urban air mobility.

#### *Texas: H.B.20*

**Summary of facts:** Creates the Applied Sciences Pathway Program, allowing high school students to earn both a diploma and a certificate in high-demand technical fields, including aviation maintenance.

**Industry impact:** A positive development, this bill could help address the aviation workforce shortage by training the next generation of aircraft maintenance technicians—a crucial area for the long-term sustainability of vertical flight operations.

#### *Utah: S.B.96*

**Summary of facts:** Directs the Utah Department of Transportation to conduct a public education campaign on advanced air mobility (AAM) covering use cases, economic benefits, state-driven initiatives, and implementation strategies.

**Industry impact:** A positive step for AAM adoption, this bill could increase public awareness and acceptance of vertical flight technologies, foster investment, and encourage industry growth in Utah.

#### *Washington: H.B.1084*

**Summary of facts:** Provides excise-tax exemptions for businesses and consumers using unleaded aviation fuel, encouraging the transition away from leaded fuel.

**Industry impact:** This bill supports sustainability initiatives and aligns with broader federal and industry goals to transition to unleaded aviation fuel. While the tax exemptions are beneficial, ensuring a sufficient supply of unleaded alternatives will be key to a smooth transition for operators.

#### *VAI Position and Actions*

VAI is actively monitoring legislative developments that affect the general aviation and

vertical flight industries. **Our goal is to work closely with state legislators to promote policies that support industry growth while addressing community concerns.**

We encourage our members to stay engaged—if you have questions about bill language or are aware of legislation in your state that may affect vertical aviation, please reach out to Katia Veraza, assistant director of government affairs and regional relations, at [katiav@verticalavi.org](mailto:katiav@verticalavi.org).

Your insights are invaluable in shaping our advocacy efforts and ensuring that state policies align with the future success of vertical aviation.

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