



## Issue Overview, Apr. 28, 2025

### US Federal Updates

[FAA Announces Steps to Improve Online Medical Certification Process](#)

### US State and Local Updates

[NYC Council Votes to Severely Restrict Helicopter Operations](#)

[Update on Washington State Luxury-Aircraft Tax Proposal](#)

[VAI Encourages Members to Complete Blue Lighting Initiative Training](#)

[Texas Selected to Lead New Advanced Aviation Technologies Center](#)

## News from VAI's Western US Regional Representative

[“Word from the Street,” by Chuck Street, VAI Western US Regional Representative](#)

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### US Federal Updates

#### FAA Announces Steps to Improve Online Medical Certification Process

##### *Summary of Facts*

VAI commends the FAA for its [decision to halt implementation of a controversial policy](#) that would have classified pilots' incomplete medical certification applications as denied, the same category assigned to pilots who have been evaluated as unfit to fly.

The FAA's announcement to shelve its plan to issue initial denials to pilots who provide incomplete examinations or paperwork occurred during an Apr. 23, 2025, stakeholder meeting focused on improving the airman medical certification process. This action comes following strong concerns raised by VAI and more than a dozen other aviation associations and labor unions. “There was a lot of stakeholder feedback, and we took it seriously,” says FAA Acting Administrator Chris Rocheleau.

Additionally, the FAA says it is working to improve the online [MedXPress portal](#) and modernize the medical process. The agency is also collaborating with industry groups to remove barriers that discourage pilots and air traffic controllers from reporting and seeking care for mental health issues.

##### *VAI Position and Actions*

VAI was among the 14 aviation groups that signed a [December 2024 letter](#) urging the FAA to reconsider the denial policy. The association also contributed to a joint pilot checklist to help members better prepare for medical exams and ensure complete and accurate submissions.

This is a win for our members and for aviation professionals across the United States. Issuing denials for incomplete paperwork would have created misleading records and

unintended career consequences. VAI is grateful the FAA took comments and feedback into consideration. These actions clearly show the agency's commitment to engage the aviation community as true partners in safety and modernization. This isn't just about avoiding harm—it's about building a system that works better for everyone.

## **US State and Local Updates**

### **NYC Council Votes to Severely Restrict Helicopter Operations**

#### ***Summary of Facts***

**Last week, the New York City (NYC) Council passed [Int. 0026-A](#), legislation that severely restricts nonessential helicopter operations at city-managed heliports and will ultimately prohibit all but fully electric-powered aircraft.**

This is one of the most extreme political assaults on the vertical aviation industry we've seen in the Northeast. This bill doesn't just aim to curb noise or address environmental concerns—it effectively seeks to push an entire industry out of one of the world's busiest and most vital economic corridors.

VAI has led a broad industry coalition—including the Eastern Region Helicopter Council, the National Business Aviation Association, the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association, the General Aviation Manufacturers Association, and the National Air Transportation Association—in opposing this legislation. Despite numerous warnings about the bill's wide-reaching consequences, the council voted to adopt measures that bypass federal authority, jeopardize safety standards, and undermine critical infrastructure investments.

This vote signals to the global aviation community that New York is closed for business. It discourages the very investments needed to bring about quieter, cleaner, more sustainable air mobility technologies.

The bill's passage comes as the vertical aviation industry is actively advancing next-generation aircraft such as electric vertical takeoff and landing vehicles. These innovations depend on robust, existing infrastructure—and inclusive public policy—to succeed.

#### ***VAI Position and Actions***

**VAI and helicopter operators in the region have always worked with—and will continue to work with—residents, the NYC Council, and the FAA to find solutions**

**that are both safe and sensible for everyone.** However, under federal law, the FAA has sole jurisdiction over US airspace, which puts this bill in direct conflict with federal authority.

VAI maintains that helicopter operations, including emergency response, infrastructure inspection, law enforcement, and business mobility, are essential to the functioning of New York City. Forcing their removal not only threatens public safety and economic productivity but also undermines the FAA's ability to administer the National Airspace System.

Safety, innovation, and community engagement have always been at the heart of what VAI does. We remain committed to those principles, and we'll defend the future of vertical aviation in New York and across the country.

## **Update on Washington State Luxury-Aircraft Tax Proposal**

### ***Summary of Facts***

**Last week, the Washington State Legislature's House Transportation and Rules Committees advanced E.S.B.5801, which includes a proposed luxury tax on noncommercial aircraft.** Beginning Jan. 1, 2026, the bill would impose a 10% tax on the portion of any noncommercial aircraft sale, lease, or transfer exceeding \$500,000. The revenue generated would go to the Move Ahead WA Flexible Account. The bill is expected to reach the governor's desk this week following the legislature's adjournment.

### ***VAI Position and Actions***

**VAI, in coordination with the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association and other aviation stakeholders, submitted testimony and conducted outreach opposing this provision.** We're now engaging the governor's office to request the removal of the aircraft tax from the bill.

As noted in the Apr. 14, 2025, edition of *The VTOL Advocate*, labeling aircraft as luxury items based solely on financial value ignores their critical roles across industries and communities. This tax could increase operational costs, reduce access to essential aviation services, and push prospective owners to neighboring states such as Oregon and Idaho. It also risks discouraging aircraft ownership and weakening the financial health of Washington's airports, many of which depend on general aviation.

To support the state's aviation ecosystem, we urge the governor to veto this bill.

## **VAI Encourages Members to Complete Blue Lighting Initiative Training**

### ***Summary of Facts***

**VAI is proud to partner with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) on the [Blue Lightning Initiative](#) (BLI), a national program that trains aviation professionals to recognize and report signs of human trafficking during air transport.**

BLI is part of the DHS [Blue Campaign](#) and is jointly led by the US Department of Transportation and US Customs and Border Protection. The program equips aviation personnel to identify potential traffickers and victims and to report suspicious activity directly to federal law enforcement. To date, over 350,000 individuals in the aviation sector have completed BLI training, resulting in numerous actionable reports.

### ***VAI Position and Actions***

**As an official BLI partner, VAI encourages all its members to complete the free training, which takes just 25 minutes.** Participation is simple: log in to VAI's learning management system and select the [Department of Homeland Security/VAI](#) BLI course. This small investment of time could make a lifesaving difference.

## **Texas Selected to Lead New Advanced Aviation Technologies Center**

### ***Summary of Facts***

**The US Department of Transportation (DOT) has selected the Texas A&M University System to lead the newly established Center for Advanced Aviation Technologies (CAAT), with testing and research sites across the Dallas–Fort Worth area and throughout Texas.**

Authorized through a provision championed by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) in the bipartisan FAA Reauthorization Act of 2024, CAAT will focus on developing and integrating emerging aviation technologies, including drones, air taxis, and supersonic and hypersonic aircraft. Texas was selected due to its strong aviation industry, favorable business climate, and extensive university network.

Under Texas A&M's leadership, CAAT will bring together a wide-ranging consortium of partners—including all 19 Texas A&M University System institutions, the University of

North Texas, Southern Methodist University, the University of Texas at Dallas, the University of Texas at Arlington, Virginia Tech's Mid-Atlantic Aviation Partnership, Louisiana State University, and numerous private and government entities. Together, they will support DOT and the FAA in advancing innovation and the integration of advanced air mobility technologies.

### ***VAI Position and Actions***

**VAI congratulates the Texas A&M University System on this important achievement and looks forward to supporting CAAT's mission and future collaborations.**

## **News from VAI's Western US Regional Representative**

### **"Word from the Street," by Chuck Street, VAI Western US Regional Representative**

On Apr. 23, it was my pleasure to host the [VAI Webinar](#) "Pete Gillies – 'Cyclic Back' Will Save Your Life." Pete is a legendary helicopter pilot and flight instructor who has done extensive research on and analysis of unsuccessful autorotations. His insights are powerful! Joining us for the event were former VAI chair Randy Rowles, president of the Helicopter Institute; Tim Tucker, former chief flight instructor at Robinson Helicopter Co.; and Chris Hill, VAI's senior director of safety. These three accomplished aviation professionals expanded on the insights that Pete provided via video in an edited lecture.

I enthusiastically recommend that every rotary-wing pilot view this presentation. Knowledge and awareness of the principles that Pete illuminates will save lives—maybe even yours!

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