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January 7, 2014

The Honorable Daniel R. Garodnick
New York City Councilmember
250 Broadway, Suite 1762
New York NY 10007

Councilmember Garodnick:

The Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA) is the national, community-based membership organization of more than 175,000 model aviation enthusiasts. By way of introduction, my name is Eric Williams. I am an AMA vice president, a lifelong New York State resident, and I formerly worked and lived in New York City.

I write today in opposition to your proposed New York City Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) legislation. As I understand it, the proposed legislation would essentially prohibit all UAV flights in New York City except when used by the New York City Police Department with a search warrant.

Your legislation runs counter to the intent of the U.S. Congress, which made clear in the FAA Modernization and Reform Act of 2012 that model aircraft should be exempt from regulation. If passed as written, your legislation would destroy a decades-old, family-oriented, and community-based recreational activity. More significantly, it will have a detrimental effect on the enthusiasm of New York City's youth in their pursuit of aerospace, aviation, technology, engineering, and similar careers.

Nationally, AMA members fly an estimated 7,000,000 flights per year and our members have been flying safely for more than seven decades. To our knowledge, none of the "drone" arrests, incidents, or reported sightings in New York City, or across the United States, has involved an AMA member. We attribute this to AMA's National Model Aircraft Safety Code, and our organization's safety culture. Compared to all other forms of aviation, model aviation has a remarkable safety record.

During the Apollo program of the 1960's, the average NASA engineer was in his or her late 20s. Today's average aeronautical engineer is in his or her mid 50s. Sadly, numerous technological innovations of today are developed outside the United States. The need is clear. America must foster a new generation of engineers, scientists, technologists, and skilled individuals who are relevant in the technology-based workplace.

Model aviation serves as aviation's stepping stone. The majority of America's civilian, military, and commercial aviators, and aviation professionals report being influenced by model aviation early in life. Neil Armstrong, aviation pioneer Burt Rutan, and astronaut Robert "Hoot" Gibson—all lifelong AMA members—are just a few examples. Even "Miracle on the Hudson" Flight 1549 pilot Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger built model airplanes in his youth. In support of this tradition, AMA is involved in numerous science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) projects through our clubs and the AMA Education department.

Model aviation has deep historical roots in New York City. The first model aircraft club in the United States was founded in Manhattan in 1908 by Miss E. Lilian Todd. Upon its establishment in 1936, AMA itself was located in the RCA building at Rockefeller Center. New York City was one of several competition venues for the formerly traveling National Model Aircraft Competitions. One of the largest model aviation expositions in the United States, the Westchester Radio Aero Modelers Show, has been held in the New York metro area for the past 47 years.

Currently, more than a dozen AMA-chartered flying clubs currently operate in and around New York City, including the Staten Island Radio Control Modelers, the Radio Control Society of Marine Park, and the Pennsylvania Avenue Radio Control Society, which flies at Brooklyn's Floyd Bennett Field, New York City's first municipal airport.

Chartered clubs adhere to AMA's safety code, benefit from AMA's expertise in flying site selection and operations, and carry liability insurance for club officers and site owners. These safe, well-run, and longstanding clubs would be grounded under your overly broad and restrictive legislation. Likewise, a child flying a toy helicopter in his or her own backyard would be considered a criminal under your bill.

AMA and its members support your desire to keep New York City safe. However, it would be unfortunate, and counter to inspiring youth, if a young girl or boy could not safely operate a model within the city limits. New York City has fostered a positive climate for young model aviators for more than 100 years, guiding their pursuit of a meaningful education and rewarding careers while inspiring their imaginations and creativity.

Recently reported UAV incidents are symptomatic of individuals not mentored in AMA's safety practices. The absence of our members from these incidents is proof of this. In Public Law 112-95 Sec. 336, the United States Congress recognized the safe and responsible operation of model aircraft flown "within the programming of a nationwide community-based organization." AMA has partnered with the FAA and industry groups in a campaign called "Know Before You Fly" to provide prospective UAV operators with the information and guidance they need to fly safely and responsibly. As the United States' community-based model aviation organization, and in the interests of safe recreational and educational UAV operations, AMA stands ready to work with New York City and all parties on recreational UAV educational programs and safety training.

We do, however, oppose overly broad and restrictive legislation that curtails constructive model aviation in New York City as it is now practiced. Closing the door on the historical and continued contributions of model aviation, as a positive recreational activity and an educational stepping stone for our youth, would be regrettable.

I would appreciate a meeting with you to discuss your legislation, our members' long history of safe flight in New York City and the positive contributions of the model aviation community. I can be reached at (518) 250-2020 or via email at districtiivp@modelaircraft.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Eric Williams". The signature is written in dark ink and has a fluid, connected style.

Eric Williams
Vice President, District II
Academy of Model Aeronautics

CC:

Honorable Andrew Cohen
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