



Leading Disability Organizations: President Trump's Blame of Deadly Plane Crash on Disabled Federal Workers Is Baseless, Irresponsible

For Immediate Release: January 30, 2025

Contact: Jess Davidson at jdavidson@aapd.com; 202-975-0960

WASHINGTON D.C. - In remarks today at the White House, President Trump cast potential blame for the tragic and deadly plane crash that occurred last night near Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport on people with disabilities employed by the Federal Aviation Administration.

Soon after the President's comments, multiple news agencies [reported](#) that the air traffic control tower was understaffed at the time of the crash. Despite these reports, the White House has [continued to double down on their baseless claims](#).

In response, **the American Association of People with Disabilities, American Council of the Blind, Autistic Self Advocacy Network, Disability Rights, Education and Defense Fund, United Spinal Association, National Federation of the Blind, and other leading disability rights organizations** issued the following statement:

The President's remarks today suggesting the deadly crash of Flight 5342 may have been the fault of public servants with disabilities are irresponsible, disparaging, and wrong. It is extremely inappropriate for the President to use this tragedy as an opportunity to advance his anti-diversity hiring agenda. The focus of the federal government and the entire nation should be on the emergency response, a thorough investigation, and most of all, supporting the families and communities who lost their loved ones in this tragedy.

People with disabilities proudly serve our nation through government service in every

federal department and agency. Disabled employees, like non-disabled employees, are hired because they meet the qualifications needed to do the job. The Federal Aviation Administration has rigorous standards for hiring Air Traffic Controllers and all other FAA employees.

Diversity hiring initiatives seek to expand the pool of potential qualified talent for a role – they do not supersede the qualifications and skills that the role requires. The implication that people are being hired to do a job for which they are unqualified is an unfounded lie that further reinforces harmful stereotypes against disabled people.

“The President is deliberately spreading falsehoods to demonize the quarter of American adults who live with disabilities rather than directing federal resources towards ensuring such a devastating tragedy never happens again. This is part of a broader coordinated attack on civil rights and equal opportunity across government. These attacks do nothing to keep Americans safe and actually threaten our ability to ensure safety by building the strongest possible aviation workforce,” **said American Association of People with Disabilities President and CEO Maria Town**

Scott Thornhill, the Executive Director of the American Council of the Blind, stated, “The tragic accident that occurred last night near Reagan Washington National Airport is one we all are deeply saddened about. This is not a time for political posturing or speculation. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of those who devastatingly lost their lives. We strongly denounce any insinuation that hiring individuals with disabilities had any part in this horrific event.”

“One of the biggest factors keeping people with disabilities out of the workforce is baseless stigma around our ability to do our jobs. Despite ample data showing the capability and productivity of disabled workers, disclosing a disability still makes job applicants 26% less likely to even get a preliminary interview. Programs like the one President Trump attacked have been part of the federal government’s work to eliminate that stigma. It is deeply disappointing to see our government now deciding instead to make it worse,” **said Colin Killick, the Executive Director of Autistic Self Advocacy Network**

“The President’s harmful speculation unfairly targets disabled workers and reinforces dangerous and baseless stereotypes,” **added Nicole Bohn, Executive Director of the**

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund. “Disability is not a liability, and these narratives only serve to fuel discrimination, exclusion, and stigma—particularly for disabled BIPOC workers who already face compounded barriers in employment. Right now, the focus must be on supporting the families and communities affected by this tragedy and ensuring a fact-based investigation—not on scapegoating disabled people who belong in every workplace, including aviation and public safety.”

“The cause of the terrible plane crash at DCA last night remains unknown,” **said Marlene Sallo, Executive Director of the National Disability Rights Network.** “Now is the time to thoroughly investigate what caused this accident and support the families who lost loved ones. It is not the time to blame or further stigmatize people with disabilities.”

Mark Riccobono, President of the National Federation of the Blind, stated, “Blind Americans share in our nation’s mourning for the lives lost in last night’s tragic accident. We are shocked that the President of the United States would reinforce unfounded misconceptions of disability by codifying them in the Keeping Americans Safe in Aviation executive order. We know that people with disabilities are among the best and brightest. We also know that our focus today and in the days to come should be on the lives lost not the misunderstanding of the lives of people with disabilities.”

The National Organization of Nurses with Disabilities (NOND), said, “NOND dramatically and strongly disagrees with the statement made by the federal administration that people with disabilities create unsafe conditions for others. The government’s statement is appalling, dehumanizing and blatantly discriminatory. NOND supports DEI which is crucial to promoting the full inclusion of marginalized populations including people with disabilities. Research indicates that with age the incidence of disability and chronic health conditions increases. Disability is not about those of us who are disabled now; it is about our society at large.”

“Blaming people with disabilities for the deadly crash at DCA is both misleading and deeply misguided. Individuals with disabilities are hired under already stringent standards due to existing biases, and when we secure employment, it is because we have clearly demonstrated our ability to perform the job with excellence,” **says United Spinal Association President & CEO Vincenzo Piscopo.** “As a person with a disability myself, I can say without hesitation that I have proudly and consistently

contributed value in every role I have held. To suggest otherwise is not only unfounded but also undermines the contributions of millions of disabled professionals who excel in their fields every day.”

This statement is provided on behalf of the following organizations:

[American Association of People with Disabilities](#)

[American Council of the Blind](#)

[Autistic Self Advocacy Network](#)

[Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network](#)

[Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law](#)

[Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund](#)

[National Coalition for Mental Health Recovery](#)

[National Disability Rights Network](#)

[National Federation of the Blind](#)

[National Organization of Nurses with Disabilities](#)

[Not Dead Yet](#)

[United Spinal Association](#)