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PFAA Praises Senators McCaskill & Snowe for Efforts to Improve Patient Safety

Washington, DC – The Patient First Air Ambulance Alliance praised Senators Claire McCaskill (D-MO) and Olympia Snowe (R-ME) today for introducing the *Helicopter Medical Services Patient Safety, Protection and Coordination Act*, S. 848. This key legislation will ensure that state emergency medical services (EMS) and public health authorities may properly oversee patient safety, quality patient care and coordination of helicopter medical services (HMS).

States have clear authority to oversee ground medical transport, but state oversight of helicopter medical transport is less defined. This lack of definition has led to situations in some states where unregulated competition in oversaturated markets is resulting in business decisions overcoming patient needs. Meanwhile, we have seen a dramatic increase in crashes and other compromises to patient safety. A report released this week by the Flight Safety Foundation highlighted the jumbled patchwork of sometimes conflicting federal and state regulation governing this essential public utility.

“PFAA is grateful for the leadership of Senator McCaskill and Senator Snowe for championing this important legislation. While HMS is primarily provided by private organizations it must be publicly accountable. The enactment of The Helicopter Medical Services Patient Safety, Protection and Coordination Act, will help protect patients and medical crew,” said Tom Judge CCT-P, chairman of PFAA and executive director of LifeFlight of Maine.

The HMS Patient Safety, Protection and Coordination Act will ensure that patient safety, quality patient care and coordination of HMS are properly overseen by state EMS and public health authorities. It would allow states, to the extent they choose, to oversee air ambulances just as they currently oversee ground ambulances, hospitals and other healthcare entities. The legislation does not direct how or whether states should govern air ambulance services. It simply sets forth a sphere in which the state is not preempted by the Airline Deregulation Act (ADA) from fulfilling its role in public health oversight.

Representatives Jason Altmire (D-PA) and Candice Miller (R-MI) introduced H.R. 978, the House companion legislation in February. The Senate bill incorporates suggestions made by the FAA and others to assure aviation safety while still recognizing the important role of states in overseeing the practice of medicine and helicopter medical services.

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The Patient First Air Ambulance Alliance (PFAA) is a grassroots organization of medical and aviation providers committed to ensuring that critically ill and injured patients have access to the safest and highest quality air medical system possible. PFAA is comprised of air-medical providers, community and business leaders, professional medical organizations, state EMS and Health Agencies, hospitals, and FAA part 135 certificate holders that are committed to improving the safety of air medical transport.