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December 4, 1998

The Honorable Frank R. Wolf
Chairman
Subcommittee on Transportation
and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

Subject: Status Information: FAA's Year 2000 Business Continuity and
Contingency Planning Efforts Are Ongoing

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Critical Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) air traffic control (ATC) operations rely on systems, interfaces with business partners, and the power and telecommunications infrastructure, all of which are subject to the Year 2000 computer problem and, consequently, must be renovated, tested, and implemented before January 1, 2000. Wisely managing the Year 2000 computing crisis requires mitigating the risk of failures by developing strong Year 2000 business continuity and contingency plans to support core ATC processes.

In January 1998, we recommended that FAA develop Year 2000 business continuity and contingency plans in order to ensure the continuity of critical operations.¹ Given the importance of continuing ATC operations through the next century, you requested we review FAA's Year 2000 business continuity and contingency planning efforts for its air traffic control system. The purpose of this letter is to describe the status of FAA's ongoing efforts.

FAA'S EFFORTS ARE ONGOING

To mitigate the risk of Year 2000-induced failures, FAA's Year 2000 program office established a risk management team in April 1998, with responsibility for business continuity and contingency planning. The risk management team's primary objective is to ensure the continuity of FAA's core business processes

¹FAA Computer Systems: Limited Progress on Year 2000 Issue Increases Risk Dramatically (GAO/AIMD-98-45, January 30, 1998).

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by identifying, assessing, and mitigating Year 2000 risks. The risk management team prepared a draft Year 2000 National Airspace System (NAS) Continuity and Contingency Plan, dated August 10, 1998, which describes the agency's approach to Year 2000 business continuity planning and focuses on one core business function, aircraft surveillance. We reviewed this draft plan and found that it does not address several broad failure scenarios that could affect aviation operations, including simultaneous Year 2000-related failures of systems across the country, widespread power outages, or failures of interfacility telecommunications systems.

FAA originally expected to issue its NAS Year 2000 Business Continuity and Contingency Plan by August 31, 1998, and an FAA-wide Year 2000 plan by December 31, 1998. However, in late August, the Year 2000 program manager decided not to issue the NAS plan as scheduled. Instead, the Year 2000 program office was to work with system users to revise the draft plan and issue it in conjunction with the FAA-wide Year 2000 continuity and contingency plan scheduled for December 31, 1998. To this end, FAA has hosted workshops attended by union representatives and subject matter experts to develop risk matrices that will be part of the agency's Year 2000 Business Continuity and Contingency Plan. Most recently, in November 1998, the Year 2000 program manager stated that FAA's December 1998 Business Continuity and Contingency Plan, to be issued in draft form, would address broad failure scenarios.

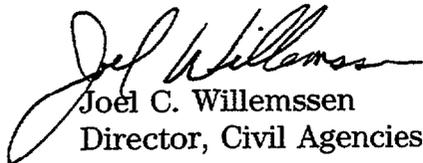
Because of the importance of ensuring that core aviation operations continue in the event of Year 2000-induced failures, it is critical that FAA complete its Year 2000 business continuity and contingency plan and focus on testing it. We plan to evaluate FAA's Business Continuity and Contingency Plan when it is available for review.

On December 2, 1998, FAA's Year 2000 program director and risk manager provided oral comments on a draft of this letter. These officials agreed with the facts presented.

We are sending copies of this report to the Ranking Minority Member of your Subcommittee and the Chairmen and Ranking Minority Members of the Senate and House Committees on Appropriations; the Subcommittee on Aviation, Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation; and the Subcommittee on Aviation, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure. We are also sending copies to the Secretary of Transportation, the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration, and other interested congressional committees and subcommittees. Copies will also be made available to others upon request.

Please contact me at (202) 512-6253 or by e-mail at *willemsenj.aimd@gao.gov* if you have any questions concerning this letter.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joel Willemssen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "W".

Joel C. Willemssen
Director, Civil Agencies Information Systems

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