February 4, 2011

The Honorable John D. Rockefeller  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
254 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kay Bailey Hutchison  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
560 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Rockefeller and Hutchison:

We want to inform you of the National Association of Counties’ (NACo) opposition to the McCain amendment to the FAA reauthorization bill to eliminate the Essential Air Service (EAS) program.

EAS serves over 150 airports in 37 states. Residents and businesses in hundreds of counties in the regions served by EAS would negatively be affected by the elimination of this program. EAS provides a link for citizens to travel to the larger communities plus a link to the nation and world through the hub airports that EAS connects to. The program plays a key role in local communities by attracting and retaining businesses that depend on commercial air service and in heath care by enabling citizens to more easily access sophisticated healthcare that is often absent in rural communities. EAS provides a real boost to the economic development efforts of rural America, which in our current economic climate makes EAS even more important. It allows economic development officials and Chambers of Commerce to answer in the affirmative when the question is posed when recruiting new industry whether that community has passenger air service.

The Senate Commerce Committee in the 111th Congress responded to concerns about EAS and on the bipartisan basis included a series of reforms in the legislation. We believe these reforms need to be tested to see if EAS can be made an even better program.

We urge you to oppose the McCain amendment. If you have any questions, please contact Bob Fogel of the NACo staff at (202) 942-4217.

Sincerely,

Larry E. Naake  
Executive Director

cc: Members of the U. S. Senate