

Federal Flight Deck Officer Program

The Federal Flight Deck Officer (FFDO) program was created in response to the September 11 attacks of 2001 and was designed to protect the aviation industry from future terrorist attacks. The ***Arming Pilots Against Terrorism Act*** was passed by Congress and was signed into law in November 2002. This law allows for the Transportation Security Agency (TSA) to deputize qualified volunteer pilots and flight crewmembers of passenger and cargo aircraft as law enforcement officers to defend the flight deck of aircraft against acts of criminal violence or air piracy. TSA began training flight-deck personnel to carry firearms in early 2003 and the first armed pilots were aboard commercial flights by April 2003. The FFDO program is considered a critical layer of security in the nation's National Security Program.

FFDO mission count (numbers of flights protected by FFDO qualified volunteer pilots) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 is on track to exceed 2023 numbers. FFDOs have completed more than 22 million missions since the program's inception. However, the budget for the FFDO program remains a hot topic for the stakeholders. There were no FFDO budget increases in the 2024 FAA reauthorization. ***Congress must increase FFDO funding to allow the program to not only survive but grow.***

The program was funded for just over 1000 initial training slots for FY 2024. Unfortunately, the backlog of cleared applicants remains so high, that it takes many months to secure a training class slot. A properly-funded FFDO program, which is easily the most efficient layer of aviation security we have in our nation, would be able to expand as the applications expand. This is one of the reasons the Allied Pilots Association is fully supporting the FFDO program's proposal to move initial training to the Federal Air Marshal School (FAMS) Training Center in Atlantic City, New Jersey, to give the program more options and flexibility to meet training requirements.

Not only do FFDOs need initial training, but they require periodic training through the FFDO Recurrent Training Program (RTP). The FFDO Program Office is optimistically proceeding with an increase to the RTP facility in Atlanta, Georgia. The increase will bring the Atlanta facility to 100% operation of 2 classes per week with 24 FFDOs per class.

The Program Office has also announced a new Senior FFDO Program prototype class. The program will give certain qualified FFDOs advanced training to include firearms, low light, tactical medical, behavior recognition, and joint FFDO / FAMS interaction. FFDO Program expansion initiatives also include international expansion and harmonization and an eventual west coast RTP site.

However, none of these expansion initiatives can exist without proper funding. ***The Allied Pilots Association urges Congress to properly fund this critical layer of security in the nation's Homeland Security budget. It is one of the easiest and most common-sense ways to protect the flying public from future terrorist attacks.***

For questions or additional information please email GAC-Chairman@alliedpilots.org