Chairman Knight, Ranking Member Murphy, and Members of the Subcommittee, Helicopter Association International (HAI) thanks the subcommittee for holding a hearing on the important issue of the aviation workforce shortage and its impact on small businesses.

The U.S. civilian general aviation sector generates more than one million jobs and more than $200 billion for the nation’s economy — and it is seeking pilots and mechanics. Today’s flight and maintenance training programs prepare tomorrow’s workforce to fly and maintain police and firefighting helicopters, air ambulances, charter and corporate aircraft, and airliners. It is vital to our nation’s economy that we maintain the pipeline of new pilots and mechanics into the industry.

For 70 years, HAI has been the trade association for civil helicopter aviation. HAI’s 4,100 members professionally operate approximately 5,500 helicopters, flying an estimated 3 million flight hours a year. Our member companies and individuals span the industry, from manned and unmanned operators, to pilots, mechanics, manufacturers, and suppliers of goods and services. Over three-quarters of our operator members run small businesses. Resolving the issue of the aviation workforce shortages impacting small businesses is critical for the success of our industry.

HAI recently released the results of a study forecasting the U.S. supply of rotorcraft pilots and mechanics over the next 18 years, confirming what many in our industry suspected. Unless there are some fundamental changes in policy, outreach, scholarships, and access to financing, the helicopter industry
faces large-scale deficits in the amount of available and qualified licensed and certificated pilots and mechanics.

The study projects a shortage of 7,469 helicopter pilots in the United States between 2018 and 2036. For maintenance technicians, the numbers are even more concerning. Our industry is projected to be short 40,613 certificated aviation mechanics in the United States between 2018 and 2036.

The study results, commissioned by HAI’s charitable arm, Helicopter Foundation International (HFI), and conducted by the University of North Dakota (UND), also gathered information on how the workforce shortage is already changing operations. For example, more than 50 percent of surveyed operators said that the shortage of pilots and mechanics would definitely or probably interfere with their operation’s ability to grow over the next five years.

The 2018 Boeing Pilot & Technician Outlook also corroborates the UND study with its forecast for a large demand of new personnel, projecting that between 2018-2037, there will be world demand for 790,000 new pilots and 754,000 new technicians.

Yet in the face of this shortage, data shows that the number of FAA private pilot certificates issued is significantly down. From 1980 to 2016, the FAA has issued 66% less certificates and the current average age of a pilot certificate holder is now 50 years old. Also alarming, from 1980 to 2016, the FAA has issued 50% less mechanics certificates.

This shortage is an industry-wide problem, and fixing it will require efforts from many sectors, including government, industry, military, finance, insurance, and education. On September 26 and 27 HAI is bringing together stakeholders from across the industry and hosting a Workforce Roundtable to address the shortage problem and discuss solutions. HAI would be pleased to share the Roundtable discussion summary with the Committee.

The career path inaccessibility is a vital component to the pipeline that needs industry attention. Safety is priority one for the industry, and pilots and mechanics entering the industry require quality training to adequately and safely operate. The financial barrier to obtain the required training can be too high for many, depleting the industry’s available pilot and mechanical labor pool. Lessons learned from the regional airlines shows that despite compensation rising for first officers, overall recruiting success declined during the same period. Higher pay will not resolve the workforce shortage until sufficient pilots can afford and access the career path.
The industry is also not currently accessing the full diversity of America. Female pilots represent only 6% of the total pilot population and 2% of the mechanic population. Clearly the industry needs to do much more in attracting greater diversity.

HAI along with our Foundation, is undertaking and moving forward on a number of important initiatives to address the workforce shortage. These projects include:

- Provide funding to high schools and postsecondary schools to implement courses that offer rotorcraft-specific training to students, who can then graduate with Aviation Maintenance Technician (AMT) qualified credit
- Increase educational partnerships between high schools and postsecondary schools
- Increase helicopter curricula in post-secondary education
- Boost helicopter/STEM awareness in children K–12
- Make aviation education affordable and accessible
- Create a database of donated, surplus, retired, or grounded helicopter equipment that can be given to schools and used to train AMTs
- Identify and match industry mentors with students to guide and motivate them to complete their studies
- Working with stakeholders and partners to increase size and quantity of scholarships
- Developing partnerships between various operators to assist in defining the career pathway to take someone through the experience gap of 200 hours to 1000 hours
- Developing partnerships with Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) schools to establish pathways for their students into the helicopter industry

HAI applauds today’s dialogue and discussion and commends the Committee for their leadership on addressing this critical workforce issue for small business. We appreciate the leadership’s willingness to listen to our unique perspective in the aviation industry. HAI is committed to working with the Small Business Committee and all of Congress to ensure our nation effectively and proactively crafts policy, outreach, scholarships, and access to financing that will benefit the country’s aviation small businesses and their critical role in the nation’s economy.