February 19, 2016

Gary A. Norek
Manager, Airspace Policy and Regulations Group
U.S. Department of Transportation
Docket Operations, M–30
West Building Ground Floor, Room W12–140
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, DC 20590-0001

Re: FAA Docket No. FAA–2015–2776 and Airspace Docket No. 15–AEA–5

Dear Mr. Norek:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on FAA Docket No. FAA–2015–2776 and Airspace Docket No. 15–AEA–5. The Governor's Aerospace Advisory Council is comprised of Virginia state legislators, as well as federal and industry partners charged with advising the Governor on policy and funding priorities to promote the Commonwealth's aerospace and space exploration industries. Our 19-member council is further mandated to devise and recommend strategies to the governor that contribute to the growth and development of Virginia's aerospace industry. We believe expanding NASA Wallops Flight Facility's restricted airspace to include R-6604 C, D and E is a critical initiative to further aerospace growth in Virginia smartly and safely. To that end, we unanimously support the Federal Aviation Administration adopting the proposed rule.

It is the long-time mission of Wallops to support the flight operations requirements of NASA, other federal agencies, industry and academia. For more than 70 years, the men and women of Wallops have amassed an incredible record of accomplishment. Today, with strong federal and state partnerships engaged in multiple, diverse missions at the facility, Wallops is poised to be the epicenter for enormous advances in the aerospace industry. Expanding Wallops' restricted airspace for use temporarily on an as-needed basis during hazardous flight operations is the right decision at the right time given the facility's increasing, vital role in aerospace research, test and development.

NASA has responsibly operated R-6604 A and B over the years, only activating the restricted airspace during hazardous launch operations and otherwise allowing aircraft passage through the area. NASA would operate the expanded restricted airspace in kind: infrequent, temporary use, publicized in advance via Notices to Airmen, for the express purpose of facilitating operations while ensuring public safety.

The FAA's proposed rule expanding Wallops' restricted airspace comes at a critical juncture, recognizing the facility's crucial role in furthering Virginia and our nation's goals in air and space. This initiative is right-sized, and NASA's proposal for operating the airspace is a balanced, safety-focused approach that is minimally impactful to the flying community. We commend the FAA for recognizing Wallops' unique capabilities as well as its expanding and evolving role in conducting diverse test and operational flight activities.

To facilitate the activities explained above safely, while also contributing economic growth and development in the region, we strongly support the adoption of this proposed rule. This action was ratified by vote of the Governor's Aerospace Advisory Council at our meeting on December 2, 2015.

Sincerely,

The Honorable David E. Yancey
Chair

C: Keith F. McCrea