FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Legislators Express Opposition to Feds Proposed Changes for Military Supersonic Flight Altitude Limits and Training

STATE CAPITOL, PHOENIX – Twenty Arizona State Legislators this week sent a letter to the U.S. Air Force Secretary Frank Kendall expressing their bipartisan opposition to a federal proposal issued in January that would significantly lower altitude limits for supersonic flights and the release of flares during training. Supersonic flights during military training missions could go as low as 5,000 feet under the proposed changes, down from the current 30,000-foot limit, resulting in much higher levels of noise and disturbance to physical structures for rural communities in southeast Arizona, where many training zones are located.

The bipartisan letter, authored by State Representative David Cook and signed by 19 of his House and Senate colleagues, also raises important concerns over the release of training flares at lower elevations which, during state fire restrictions, could present major fire hazards and put people and property at greater risk. The proposed federal changes enable the Air Force to drop flares from 2,000 feet above the ground, rather than at the current 5,000-foot minimum.

A copy of the signed letter is attached.

David Cook is a Republican member of the Arizona House of Representatives serving Legislative District 8, which includes areas of Pinal and Gila Counties. Follow him on Twitter at @RepDavidCook.
February 28, 2022

The Honorable Frank Kendall III
Secretary of the U.S. Air Force
1690 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20330-1670

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The undersigned bi-partisan members of the Arizona House of Representatives write to express our concern about the U.S. Air Force proposal to allow planes/jets to perform training missions by flying at supersonic speeds at an elevation of 5,000 feet over rural communities in southeastern Arizona. Currently they may not and should not fly lower than 30,000 feet under current rules.

We believe that training missions are essential to the military in maintaining a “ready” defense but in carrying out these training missions, pilot shoot flares to practice confusing enemy radar in tracking their planes and other objectives.

On June 4, 2021, the day the Telegraph Fire started, Airforce planes were seen over the Tonto National Forest. The fire started in an area that is commonly used by recreationists for camping or hiking. The Forest Service reported the fire was human caused, without providing further detail. However, the U.S. Air Force confirmed that its planes were flying over the forest that day but reported that no plane flew lower than 11,700 feet and that any flare dropped from that altitude would have burned out before reaching the ground. This is still under investigation.

The military should consider conditions related to fire restrictions during the time frames of when local, state and federal fire restrictions are in place and suspend the use of these “flares” or any other munitions that may spark a wildfire in the state of Arizona.

"The Air Force would also seek to drop flares from 2,000 feet above the ground, rather than 5,000 feet."

Our state has suffered a number of devastating fires in recent years. We are suffering from one of the most severe droughts in recorded history. It is reckless for the U.S. Air Force to put our communities, citizens, and natural resources at further risk by proposing to fly training sessions at 2,000 feet during which flares could be dropped.

We ask you to bar the use of flares below 5,000 feet in training sessions and not allow their use during fire restrictions when enacted in the state.
"The Air Force will also lower the altitude for supersonic speeds down to 5,000 feet above ground level in the Tombstone, Outlaw, Jackal, Morenci, and Reserve areas, down from 30,000 feet above sea level now."

We ask for you to maintain a level of 25,000 during supersonic speeds.

"Jets that don't break the sound barrier will also be allowed to fly as low as 100 feet above ground level in the Tombstone MOA, and at 500 feet above ground level in the Outlaw, Jackal, Bagdad, and Gladden MOA."

We ask that the military maintain an elevation of 1,000 feet.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

David Cook (R)
Representative, District 8

Frank Carroll (R)
Representative, District 22

John Fillmore (R)
Representative, District 16

Pamela Powers Hannley (D)
Representative, District 9

Rick Gray (R)
Senate Majority Leader
Senator, District 21

Jasmine Blackwater-Nygren (D)
Representative, District 7

Walter "Walt" Blackman (R)
Representative, District 6

Rebecca Rios (D)
Senate Democratic Leader
Senator, District 27

Brian Fernandez (D)
Representative, District 4

Mark Finchem (R)
Representative, District 11

Neal Carter (R)
Representative, District 8

Kelly Townsend (R)
Senator, District 16
Marcelino Quiñonez (D)  
Representative, District 27

John Kavanagh (R)  
Representative, District 23

Kevin Payne (R)  
Representative, District 21

Joel John (R)  
Representative, District 4

Andrés Cano (D)  
Representative, District 3

Richard Andrade (D)  
Representative, District 29

Tim Dunn (R)  
Representative, District 13

Thomas "T.J." Shope (R)  
Senator, District 8