

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1961

To streamline the application of regulations relating to commercial space launch and reentry requirements and licensing of private remote sensing space systems, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

JUNE 5, 2025

Mr. CORNYN (for himself, Mr. LUJÁN, Mr. SCOTT of Florida, and Mr. KELLY) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

A BILL

To streamline the application of regulations relating to commercial space launch and reentry requirements and licensing of private remote sensing space systems, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Licensing Aerospace
5 Units to New Commercial Heights Act” or the “LAUNCH
6 Act”.

1 **SEC. 2. STREAMLINING REGULATIONS RELATING TO COM-**
2 **MERCIAL SPACE LAUNCH AND REENTRY RE-**
3 **QUIREMENTS.**

4 (a) EVALUATION OF IMPLEMENTATION OF PART
5 450.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 120 days
7 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
8 retary of Transportation (referred to in this Act as
9 the “Secretary”) shall evaluate the implementation
10 of part 450 of title 14, Code of Federal Regulations
11 (in this section referred to as “part 450”) and the
12 impacts of part 450 on the commercial spaceflight
13 industry.

14 (2) ELEMENTS.—The evaluation required by
15 paragraph (1) shall include an assessment of—

16 (A) whether increased uncertainty in the
17 commercial spaceflight industry has resulted
18 from the implementation of part 450;

19 (B) whether part 450 has resulted in oper-
20 ational delays to launch; and

21 (C) whether timelines for reviews have
22 changed, including an assessment of the impact
23 of the incremental review process on those
24 timelines and the root cause for multiple re-
25 views, if applicable.

1 (3) REPORT REQUIRED.—Not later than 90
2 days after completing the review required by para-
3 graph (1), the Secretary shall submit to the Com-
4 mittee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of
5 the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space,
6 and Technology of the House of Representatives a
7 report that includes—

8 (A) the findings of the review;

9 (B) recommendations for reducing delays
10 and inefficiencies resulting from part 450 that
11 do not rely solely on additional personnel or
12 funding; and

13 (C) an estimate for a timeline and funding
14 for implementing the recommendations de-
15 scribed in subparagraph (B).

16 (b) RULEMAKING COMMITTEE.—

17 (1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall continue
18 to support an Aerospace Rulemaking Committee for
19 the commercial space transportation industry, com-
20 prised of established and emerging United States
21 commercial space launch and reentry services pro-
22 viders (including providers that hold, and providers
23 that have applied for but not yet received, licenses
24 issued under chapter 509 of title 51, United States
25 Code)——

(A) to facilitate industry participation in developing recommendations for amendments to part 450 to address the challenges identified in conducting the review required by subsection (a) or under paragraph (2) of section 50905(d) of title 51, United States Code (as added by subsection (d)(3)); and

(B) to provide a long-term forum for the United States commercial spaceflight industry to share perspectives relating to regulations affecting the industry.

(2) PREVENTION OF DUPLICATIVE EFFORTS.—

The Secretary shall ensure that an Aerospace Rule-making Committee established under this subsection does not provide services or make efforts that are duplicative of the services provided and efforts made by the Commercial Space Transportation Advisory Committee.

(c) ENCOURAGEMENT OF INNOVATION.—The Sec-

retary shall, on an ongoing basis, determine whether any requirements for a license issued under chapter 509 of title 51, United States Code, can be modified or eliminated to encourage innovative new technologies and operations.

(d) MODIFICATIONS TO REQUIREMENTS AND PROCE-

DURES FOR LICENSE APPLICATIONS.—

1 (1) CONSIDERATION OF SAFETY RATIONALES
2 OF LICENSE APPLICANTS.—Section 50905(a)(2) of
3 title 51, United States Code, is amended—

4 (A) by striking “Secretary may” inserting
5 the following: “Secretary—

6 “(A) may”;

7 (B) by striking the period at the end and
8 inserting “; and”; and

9 (C) by adding at the end the following:

10 “(B) shall accept a reasonable safety ra-
11 tionale proposed by an applicant for a license
12 under this chapter, including new approaches,
13 consistent with paragraph (1).”.

14 (2) FACILITATION OF LICENSE APPLICATIONS
15 AND ASSISTANCE TO APPLICANTS.—Section
16 50905(a) of title 51, United States Code, is amend-
17 ed by adding at the end the following:

18 “(3) In carrying out paragraph (1), the Sec-
19 retary shall assign a licensing team lead to each ap-
20 plicant for a license under this chapter to assist the
21 applicant in streamlining the process for reviewing
22 and approving the license application.”.

23 (3) STREAMLINING OF REVIEW PROCESSES.—
24 Section 50905(d) of title 51, United States Code, is

1 amended by striking the end period and inserting
 2 the following: “, including by—

3 “(1) adjudicating determinations with respect
 4 to such applications and revisions to such determina-
 5 tions in a timely manner as part of the incremental
 6 review process under section 450.33 of title 14, Code
 7 of Federal Regulations (or a successor regulation);
 8 and

9 “(2) eliminating and streamlining duplicative
 10 review processes with other agencies, particularly re-
 11 lating to the use of Federal ranges or requirements
 12 to use the assets of Federal ranges.”.

13 **SEC. 3. DIGITAL LICENSING, PERMITTING, AND APPROVAL**
 14 **SYSTEM.**

15 (a) IN GENERAL.—Section 50905 of title 51, United
 16 States Code, is amended by adding at the end the fol-
 17 lowing:

18 “(e) DIGITAL LICENSING, PERMITTING, AND AP-
 19 PROVAL SYSTEM.—

20 “(1) ESTABLISHMENT.—

21 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to paragraph
 22 (4), not later than 60 days after the date of the
 23 enactment of this subsection, the Secretary
 24 shall develop and maintain a digital licensing,
 25 permitting, and approval system—

1 “(i) to accept, track, and provide rel-
2 evant status information regarding each li-
3 cense or permit application under this
4 chapter, beginning with receipt of the ini-
5 tial application through final approval or
6 denial of the application; and

7 “(ii) to provide notifications to an ap-
8 plicant with respect to the status of such
9 an application.

10 “(B) ELEMENTS.—The system required by
11 subparagraph (A) shall include, at a minimum,
12 information on—

13 “(i) the date on which an application
14 was received by the Secretary;

15 “(ii) each date on which the applica-
16 tion was referred to any other agency of
17 the Federal Government for review, as ap-
18 plicable;

19 “(iii) each date on which additional
20 information was requested from the appli-
21 cant, as applicable;

22 “(iv) the date on which the Secretary
23 notified the applicant of a final approval or
24 denial of the application; and

1 “(v) the overall rate of success of such
2 system in meeting the timelines set forth
3 in this section.

4 “(2) PUBLIC AVAILABILITY.—The Secretary
5 shall—

6 “(A) make the information maintained by
7 the system required by paragraph (1) available
8 on a publicly accessible website of the Depart-
9 ment of Transportation; and

10 “(B) ensure that such information is up-
11 dated on such website not less frequently than
12 quarterly.

13 “(3) NOTIFICATION.—With respect to an appli-
14 cation for a license or permit under this chapter, the
15 Secretary shall provide through the digital licensing,
16 permitting, and approval system developed under
17 this subsection electronic notification to an appli-
18 cant—

19 “(A) immediately on—

20 “(i) receipt of a license or permit ap-
21 plication;

22 “(ii) a determination under subsection
23 (f) that an application received by the Sec-
24 retary is complete;

1 “(iii) initiation of application proc-
 2 essing;

3 “(iv) transmission of the application,
 4 in whole or part, for interagency review, as
 5 applicable, and such notification shall in-
 6 clude an identification of the 1 or more
 7 agencies with which application informa-
 8 tion is shared; and

9 “(v) approval or denial of the applica-
 10 tion; and

11 “(B) with respect to—

12 “(i) any question proposed by the Sec-
 13 retary to the applicant;

14 “(ii) responses provided to the Sec-
 15 retary by any agency involved in inter-
 16 agency review, as applicable; and

17 “(iii) any other status update the Sec-
 18 retary considers necessary.

19 “(4) EXISTING SYSTEMS.—In carrying out
 20 paragraph (1), the Secretary shall utilize a commer-
 21 cially available system that can be used off-the-shelf.

22 “(f) COMPLETE APPLICATION.—An application sub-
 23 mitted under this section shall be considered complete if,
 24 at the time of electronic submission, the applicant has pro-

1 vided in standard digital format all information required
 2 under subsection (b).”.

3 (b) FUNDING.—Of the amounts made available for
 4 the Federal Aviation Administration for Commercial
 5 Space Transportation Safety Research and Development
 6 for fiscal year 2025, not more than \$5,000,000 may be
 7 made available to develop the digital licensing, permitting,
 8 and approval system described in section 50905(e) of title
 9 51, United States Code.

10 **SEC. 4. ANNUAL BRIEFING ON GOVERNMENT PROCESSING**
 11 **OF COMMERCIAL SPACE LAUNCH AND RE-**
 12 **ENTRY LICENSES.**

13 (a) REQUIREMENT.—Not later than March 31 each
 14 calendar year, the Secretary shall brief the appropriate
 15 committees of Congress on the licensing and permitting
 16 process for space activities required by section 50905 of
 17 title 51, United States Code.

18 (b) ELEMENTS.—The briefing required by subsection
 19 (a) shall include, with respect to the preceding calendar
 20 year, the following:

21 (1) The average number of days that elapsed
 22 between the date on which an application is sub-
 23 mitted and the date on which an applicant receives
 24 final approval or denial of the application.

1 (2) The frequency and average duration of toll-
2 ing against submitted applications.

3 (3) The number of applications reviewed that
4 exceeded the statutorily provided review timelines.

5 (4) A description of efforts made by the Sec-
6 retary to streamline, under section 50905(d) of title
7 51, United States Code, the processes required for
8 review of applications.

9 (5) A summary of the information generated by
10 the digital licensing, permitting, and approval sys-
11 tem established under section 50905(e) of title 51,
12 United States Code, including any additional infor-
13 mation the Secretary considers relevant with respect
14 to the function or processes of such system.

15 (6) An assessment as to whether the application
16 review process operates in a manner that encourages
17 the global competitiveness of the commercial space
18 industry of the United States.

19 (c) APPROPRIATE COMMITTEES OF CONGRESS DE-
20 FINED.—In this section, the term “appropriate commit-
21 tees of Congress” means—

22 (1) the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
23 Transportation and the Committee on Appropria-
24 tions of the Senate; and

1 (2) the Committee on Science, Space, and
2 Technology, the Committee on Transportation and
3 Infrastructure, and the Committee on Appropria-
4 tions of the House of Representatives.

5 **SEC. 5. DIRECT HIRE FOR OFFICE OF COMMERCIAL SPACE**
6 **TRANSPORTATION.**

7 (a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Transportation
8 shall use direct hire authorities (as such authorities ex-
9 isted on the day before the date of the enactment of this
10 Act) to hire individuals on a noncompetitive basis for posi-
11 tions related to space launch and reentry licensing and
12 permit activities.

13 (b) ANNUAL REPORT.—Not less frequently than an-
14 nually, the Secretary of Transportation shall submit to the
15 Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation of
16 the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space, and
17 Technology of the House of Representatives an annual re-
18 port on the use of direct hiring authorities to fill such posi-
19 tions within the Commercial Space Transportation Admin-
20 istration related to commercial space launch and reentry
21 licensing and permit activities.

1 **SEC. 6. ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMERCIAL SPACE TRANS-**
 2 **PORTATION ADMINISTRATION.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 509 of title 51, United
 4 States Code, is amended by inserting after section 50902
 5 the following:

6 **“§ 50902A. Commercial Space Transportation Admin-**
 7 **istration**

8 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—There is established within
 9 the Department of Transportation a Commercial Space
 10 Transportation Administration.

11 “(b) LEADERSHIP.—The Commercial Space Trans-
 12 portation Administration shall be headed by an Adminis-
 13 trator, who shall report directly to the Secretary of Trans-
 14 portation.

15 “(c) DUTIES.—The Administrator of the Commercial
 16 Space Transportation Administration shall exercise the
 17 authorities of the Secretary of Transportation with respect
 18 to commercial space launch and reentry activities, includ-
 19 ing the authorities provided under this chapter.”.

20 (b) CLERICAL AMENDMENT.—The table of sections
 21 at the beginning of chapter 509 of such title is amended
 22 by inserting after the item relating to section 50902 the
 23 following:

“50902A. Commercial Space Transportation Administration.”.

1 **SEC. 7. FLIGHT SAFETY ANALYSIS WORKFORCE.**

2 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
3 gress that—

4 (1) flight safety analysis is critical to maintain-
5 ing a high level of public safety for commercial space
6 launches from, and reentries to, Federal ranges;

7 (2) significant expertise in flight safety analysis
8 exists within the Department of Defense, the De-
9 partment of Transportation, and the National Aero-
10 nautics and Space Administration; and

11 (3) the increasing pace of commercial launch
12 and reentries requires greater cooperation among
13 the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary, and the Ad-
14 ministrator of the National Aeronautics and Space
15 Administration to support commercial launch and
16 reentry activities at Federal ranges.

17 (b) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date
18 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary, in consultation
19 with the Secretary of Defense and the Administrator of
20 the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, shall
21 submit to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and
22 Transportation and the Committee on Armed Services of
23 the Senate and the Committee on Science, Space, and
24 Technology and the Committee on Armed Services of the
25 House of Representatives a report that identifies roles, re-
26 sponsibilities, expertise, and knowledge that exists within

1 the executive branch of the Federal Government relating
2 to analysis of flight safety for space launch and reentry
3 activities.

4 (c) MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING.—Upon
5 completion of the report required by subsection (b), the
6 Secretary may enter into a memorandum of understanding
7 with the Secretary of Defense and the Administrator of
8 the National Aeronautics and Space Administration to
9 allow Federal range personnel to support flight safety
10 analysis required for the licensing of commercial space
11 launch and reentry activities.

12 **SEC. 8. STREAMLINING LICENSING OF PRIVATE REMOTE**
13 **SENSING SPACE SYSTEMS.**

14 (a) CLARIFICATION OF REMOTE SENSING REGU-
15 LATORY AUTHORITY OVER CERTAIN IMAGING SYS-
16 TEMS.—Section 60121(a)(2) of title 51, United States
17 Code, is amended by adding at the end the following: “In-
18 struments determined by the Secretary in writing to be
19 used primarily for mission assurance or other technical
20 purposes shall not be considered to be conducting remote
21 sensing. Instruments used primarily for mission assurance
22 or other technical purposes are instruments used to sup-
23 port the health of the launch vehicle or the operator’s
24 spacecraft or the safety of the operator’s space operations,
25 including instruments used to support on-board self-moni-

1 toring for technical assurance, flight reliability, spaceflight
 2 safety, navigation, attitude control, separation events, pay-
 3 load deployments, or instruments collecting self-images.”.

4 (b) FACILITATION OF LICENSE APPLICATIONS AND
 5 ASSISTANCE TO APPLICANTS.—

6 (1) IN GENERAL.—Section 60121 of title 51,
 7 United States Code, is amended—

8 (A) by redesignating subsections (d) and
 9 (e) as subsections (e) and (f), respectively; and

10 (B) by inserting after subsection (c) the
 11 following:

12 “(d) ASSIGNMENT OF DEDICATED LICENSING OFFI-
 13 CER.—The Secretary shall assign a licensing officer to
 14 oversee the application of the applicant for a license under
 15 subsection (a). The licensing officer shall assist the appli-
 16 cant by facilitating the application process, minimizing li-
 17 cense conditions, and expediting the review and approval
 18 of the application, to the extent authorized by law.”.

19 (2) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section
 20 60122(b)(3) of title 51, United States Code, is
 21 amended by striking “section 60121(e)” and insert-
 22 ing “section 60121(f)”.

23 (c) TRANSPARENCY AND EXPEDITIOUS REVIEW OF
 24 LICENSES.—In carrying out the authorities under sub-

1 chapter III of chapter 601 of title 51, United States Code,
2 the Secretary shall—

3 (1) provide transparency to and engagement
4 with applicants throughout the licensing process, in-
5 cluding by stating with specificity to the applicant or
6 licensee what basis caused the tiering determination
7 of the license;

8 (2) minimize the timelines for review of com-
9 mercial remote sensing licensing applications; and

10 (3) not less frequently than annually, reevaluate
11 the criteria for the tiering of satellite systems, with
12 a goal of expeditiously recategorizing Tier 3 systems
13 to a lower tier without temporary license conditions.

14 **SEC. 9. GAO REPORT.**

15 (a) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 1 year after the
16 date of the enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General
17 of the United States shall submit to the Committee on
18 Commerce, Science, and Transportation of the Senate and
19 the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology of the
20 House of Representatives a report on the policies, regula-
21 tions, and practices of the Department of Commerce (re-
22 ferred to in this section as the “Department”) with respect
23 to the private remote sensing space industry.

24 (b) ELEMENTS.—The report required by subsection
25 (a) shall include the following:

1 (1) An assessment of the extent to which such
2 licensing policies, regulations, and practices of the
3 Department promote or inhibit a robust domestic
4 private remote sensing industry, including any re-
5 strictions that impede innovative remote sensing ca-
6 pabilities.

7 (2) Recommendations on changes to policies,
8 regulations, and practices for consideration by the
9 Secretary of Commerce to promote United States in-
10 dustry leadership in private remote sensing capabili-
11 ties, including recommendations for—

12 (A) determining whether the costs to in-
13 dustry outweigh the benefits of conducting on-
14 site ground station visits, and possible alter-
15 natives to ensuring compliance;

16 (B) assessing the information in a license
17 application that should be treated as a material
18 fact and the justification for such treatment;

19 (C) incorporating industry feedback into
20 Department policies, regulations, and practices;
21 and

22 (D) increasing Department transparency
23 by—

24 (i) ensuring the wide dissemination of
25 Department guidance;

- 1 (ii) providing clear application instruc-
- 2 tions; and
- 3 (iii) establishing written precedent of
- 4 Department actions.

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