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STATEMENT BY CONGRESSMEMBER KAREN BASS ON THE SANTA MONICA AIRPORT LEGAL SETTLEMENT

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The City of Santa Monica recently announced a legal settlement with the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) that appeared to give a clear end-date for operations at the Santa Monica Airport, something the communities of Mar Vista, Venice and West L.A. have been seeking for years now. Initially, this seemed like a big win for residents on the Westside. Now, however, as more details of the deal emerge, some of the expected benefits may be less certain than I had thought, especially related to health and safety.

Most importantly, the agreement will continue to permit the use of fuels containing lead for the next 12 years, and it does not guarantee the 1,000-foot buffer zone between the runway and nearby homes that residents have demanded. Twenty nine years after lead was banned from auto fuel, it can still be found in aviation gas, and studies show that children living near airports have elevated levels of lead in their blood. Lead is a known neurotoxin with no safe exposure level, especially for developing children. Though free of lead, jet fuel contains other highly toxic components that have grave health effects.

The agreement does give the city the ability to shorten the runway, which may limit larger, noisier jets once those changes are complete. Financing for those runway changes, however, might incur further obligations to the FAA beyond 2028. There is no agreement to actually close the airport in 2029 -- just an agreement to keep the airport open until then.

Now that the court has accepted the terms of the settlement, I will continue to work actively with community members and with decision-makers at the local and federal levels, including Santa Monica city officials, L.A. Councilmember Mike Bonin, and my colleague, Rep. Ted Lieu. With a lack of clarity on the problems above and others, I remain deeply concerned.

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