



Airline Division / Division du Transport Aérien
Canadian Union of Public Employees / Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique
Affiliated with International Transport Workers Federation / Fédération Internationale Des Ouvriers du Transport

DELIVERED VIA EMAIL

May 22, 2026

Patty Hajdu
Minister of Jobs and Families
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Hajdu,

RE: CUPE's Assessment of Airlines' Minimum Wage-Compliance Self-Audit

On behalf of CUPE and the 20,000 flight attendants we represent across Canada's airline industry, we are writing to raise serious concerns regarding the conclusions reached by airlines' minimum wage compliance self-audits conducted as part of Phase 2 of the federal probe into unpaid work in the airline industry.

The airlines' self-audits fail to properly account for the realities of flight attendants' working conditions and compensation structures. As a result, they significantly underestimate the hours flight attendants spend at work and at the disposal of their employer, while overstating compliance with the Canada Labour Code.

Flight attendants do not work standard 9-to-5 schedules. Their work requires them to spend extended periods away from home, often over multiple days, while remaining continuously available to the airline. As we emphasized on multiple occasions to your department officials and to you directly, any assessment of compliance with federal minimum wage standards must recognize the full scope of this working time and the longstanding compensation systems used throughout the industry.

CUPE believes the current approach taken by the airlines, and accepted under the existing interpretation of the Code, fails to reflect the true nature of flight attendants' work and risks legitimizing ongoing unpaid labour in the industry.

25 Belfield Road
Etobicoke, ON
M9W 1E8

The job of flight attendants is to travel. They leave home on the first day of an assignment, known as a pairing, and return home at the end of their assignment. A pairing can last one day or multiple days, depending on schedules, which vary every month.

Being a flight attendant is not a standard Monday-to-Friday, 9-to-5 job. Flight attendants are physically away from home for long periods while working extended hours over a 24-hour period. It is not uncommon for flight attendants to spend hundreds of hours away from home each month. These unpredictable schedules also limit their ability to hold additional employment.

In addition, many flight attendants are required to remain on reserve or on call for periods of up to 24 hours at a time with no compensation unless they are assigned flying duties. During these periods, flight attendants must remain available to report to work on short notice, significantly limiting their ability to make personal plans, travel freely, or pursue other employment, despite receiving no pay for that time.

Most flight attendants are paid through a monthly minimum guarantee system. Historically, flight attendants received a flat monthly amount covering all work-related time and time spent away from home. While this system provided stable compensation, it did not account for differences in flying hours between employees. As a result, the industry shifted to a system where compensation remains monthly, but is tied to hours flown or an unrealistic monthly minimum.

Flight attendants also negotiated protections against excessive unpaid time spent available for work while away from home. These protections were intended to reduce long periods spent waiting between flights or during delays.

On flying days, guarantees vary between airlines, but a common standard guarantees one hour of paid flying time for every two hours on duty. For multi-day pairings, many flight attendants are guaranteed one paid flying hour for every four hours away from home. These protections were intended to provide a minimum level of income and compensation during delays or extended waiting periods.

These guarantees have historically helped protect flight attendants from earning below minimum wage. When compensation levels were set at approximately four times minimum wage for junior flight attendants, as they were at Air Canada and Canadian Pacific between the 1950s and early 2000s, compensation for time spent away from home was generally sufficient to meet minimum wage requirements. For example, flying 12 paid hours at four times minimum wage over a 48-hour period guaranteed junior flight attendant's earnings at or above minimum wage.

However, after decades of wage erosion, many flight attendants, especially junior employees, are now paid at much lower rates. As a result, many earn below minimum wage when all hours at work are considered. Today, a flight attendant earning less than twice minimum wage, while protected by a one-hour-for-two-hours-on-duty guarantee, can still earn below minimum wage

overall. CUPE demonstrated this during Phase 1 of the probe, showing that hundreds of flight attendants were effectively paid below minimum wage on assigned duty days.

Phase 2 of the probe cannot ignore the historical structure of flight attendant compensation or the reality that flight attendants remain at the disposal of airlines for far more time than is currently counted. Unfortunately, the Canada Labour Code and IPG-02 are not designed to properly account for these realities. Instead, they focus on estimating a “normal hourly rate of pay” without considering the actual nature of flight attendant work.

Definitions of “work” used in other jurisdictions include all time an employee spends at the disposal of the employer. For flight attendants, this includes far more than hours formally recorded as on duty. It includes time spent passing through security, travelling to gates, conducting pre-flight checks, boarding passengers, assisting passengers during boarding and flights, waiting during delays, deplaning, carrying out emergency procedures, reporting for and transiting between crew hotels and the airport, and waiting for reassignment.

When calculating the normal hourly rate of pay, all of these hours should be included as working time. Alternatively, airlines should remove from monthly earnings any compensation intended to account for waiting time or availability away from home before calculating hourly compliance rates.

Despite CUPE’s repeated efforts to raise these concerns with both the federal government and the airlines, most airlines have calculated their normal hourly rates of pay using unadjusted monthly earnings and an extremely narrow definition of hours worked. As a result, they overstate earnings, understate hours worked, and produce misleading conclusions regarding compliance with the Canada Labour Code. This is the case for Air Canada, Air Canada Rouge, Flair, WestJet, and others.

However, airlines themselves have already acknowledged elsewhere that flight attendants work far more hours than those included in the self-audits.

For example, the WestJet Mainline collective agreement states in Article 43.1.03:

*“The Cabin Personnel rates of pay outlined above are based on a Credit Hour system. It is understood that the Credit Hour system provides wages on a basis **other than duty time worked.**”*

In other words, WestJet recognizes that compensation covers more than simply hours flown or hours formally recorded as on duty. Therefore, when conducting a wage compliance self-audit, WestJet and other airlines should include all hours flight attendants remain available for work beyond the formal duty period, not only hours worked near an aircraft or at the airport.

At Air Canada, the parties went even further by agreeing on a conversion formula that translates paid credit hours into hours worked for Employment Insurance reporting purposes.

Letter of Understanding 41 states:

The current Air Canada pay system, which is based upon a Monthly Minimum Guarantee (MMG) and associated pay credits does not make it feasible to report all cabin personnel hours of work for which there has been remuneration... The current Air Canada pay system is a longstanding compensation structure designed to deal with extremely complex work rules. The existing pay and operational tracking systems which are based on industry-wide systems were never intended nor designed to report all hours worked covered by this type of pay system... As a result, and in order to report insurable hours on EI Records of Employment for cabin personnel, the parties agree that the following formulas will be used:

- *All flight credit hours (regardless of rate of Pay) times a factor of 2.0 reflecting on average, the sum of duty periods hours operated and paid, plus hours of work paid through MMG. Example: 70 hours paid at full rate, plus 4 hours paid at half rate of pay, will result in 74 recognized hours times 2.0, equaling 148 hours.*

Air Canada and Air Canada Rouge should therefore be required to apply this same formula when calculating minimum wage compliance. Otherwise, the airline is effectively reporting two different sets of working hours to the federal government while acknowledging that actual work extends beyond recorded duty hours.

CUPE remodelled Air Canada's calculations using the formula already agreed upon in LOU 41. The results were dramatically different from those reported by the airline. Under this method, **all audited junior flight attendants were paid, on average, below minimum wage** during the audit period.

If the federal government applied this same formula across the airline industry for junior flight attendants earning less than twice minimum wage, similar conclusions would likely be reached throughout the sector.

In summary, the airlines' self-audits relied on an incomplete and overly narrow definition of hours at work when calculating compliance with minimum wage requirements. At the same time, they included compensation intended to account for waiting time, availability, and time away from home without properly accounting for the hours associated with those duties and obligations.

For these reasons, we respectfully call on you to reject the conclusions submitted by the airlines and to amend Regulation 20 of the Canada Labour Code so that all time spent by flight attendants at the disposal of the airline is recognized as working time for the purpose of calculating minimum wage compliance. At minimum, the government should apply the same formula already agreed to by CUPE and Air Canada for Employment Insurance reporting purposes.

Phase 2 of the probe also confirms that airlines continue to compensate flight attendants primarily for hours flown, despite recognizing that flight attendants perform significantly more

work than the hours for which they are paid. We therefore also call on the federal government to require all airlines to pay flight attendants for all hours on duty at their regular rate of pay. These measures would help bring an end to longstanding unpaid work in the airline industry, ensure compliance with federal labour standards, and provide fair compensation for the unique and demanding working conditions flight attendants face while away from home and under the control of their employer.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We urge the federal government to take meaningful action to address unpaid work in the airline industry and ensure that flight attendants receive the full protections guaranteed under the Canada Labour Code.

In solidarity,



Wesley Lesosky
President, Airline Division Council of Presidents &
President, Air Canada Component of CUPE

cc: Air Canada Component of CUPE Executive
Airline Division Council of Presidents
Kevin Tyrrell, Component Staff Rep - CUPE National
Hugh Pouliot, Senior Communications Officer - CUPE National
Sylvain Schetagne, Senior Research Officer - CUPE National

Attachment – Appendix A

APPENDIX A

Air Canada Rouge Audited Flight Attendants, May 2025

Audited Rouge Employees	Duty Hours reported by Rouge	Approx. Credit-based hours paid	Unpaid Hours	Formula based hours at work for EI	CA Hourly Rate	Monthly Earnings	Effective Hourly Rate Calculated by Air Canada	Normal rate of pay as per the Collective Agreement
1	128,17	81,66	46,51	163,32	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 547,80	\$ 19,88	\$ 15,60
2	143,45	124,01	19,44	248,01	\$ 31,20	\$ 3 868,97	\$ 26,97	\$ 15,60
3	116,12	83,23	32,89	166,46	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 596,78	\$ 22,36	\$ 15,60
4	115,88	85,81	30,07	171,63	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 677,39	\$ 23,10	\$ 15,60
5	97,20	87,04	10,16	174,09	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 715,73	\$ 27,94	\$ 15,60
6	101,22	82,78	18,44	165,56	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 582,75	\$ 25,52	\$ 15,60
7	95,30	86,59	8,71	173,19	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 701,71	\$ 28,35	\$ 15,60
8	107,10	83,75	23,35	167,50	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 613,00	\$ 24,40	\$ 15,60
9	100,87	85,78	15,09	171,56	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 676,32	\$ 26,53	\$ 15,60
10	106,37	81,97	24,40	163,94	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 557,39	\$ 24,04	\$ 15,60
11	126,45	92,00	34,45	184,01	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 870,55	\$ 22,70	\$ 15,60
12	103,67	79,97	23,70	159,94	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 495,06	\$ 24,07	\$ 15,60
13	102,00	78,55	23,45	157,10	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 450,77	\$ 24,03	\$ 15,60
14	99,02	81,72	17,30	163,44	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 549,67	\$ 25,75	\$ 15,60
15	103,03	82,40	20,64	164,79	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 570,80	\$ 24,95	\$ 15,60
16	117,68	91,98	25,71	183,95	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 869,62	\$ 24,38	\$ 15,60
17	102,35	80,20	22,15	160,40	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 502,24	\$ 24,45	\$ 15,60
18	107,48	77,07	30,41	154,14	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 404,58	\$ 22,37	\$ 15,60
19	122,82	87,81	35,01	175,62	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 739,68	\$ 22,31	\$ 15,60
20	168,78	106,97	61,82	213,93	\$ 31,20	\$ 3 337,38	\$ 19,77	\$ 15,60
21	108,70	92,06	16,64	184,13	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 872,38	\$ 26,42	\$ 15,60
22	119,75	89,39	30,36	178,78	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 788,97	\$ 23,29	\$ 15,60
23	134,03	86,28	47,76	172,55	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 691,83	\$ 20,08	\$ 15,60
24	114,18	82,93	31,26	165,85	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 587,26	\$ 22,66	\$ 15,60
25	107,62	78,63	28,99	157,25	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 453,12	\$ 22,79	\$ 15,60
26	111,92	81,09	30,83	162,18	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 530,01	\$ 22,61	\$ 15,60
27	129,00	79,00	50,00	158,00	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 464,87	\$ 19,11	\$ 15,60
28	102,67	82,13	20,54	164,26	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 562,46	\$ 24,96	\$ 15,60
29	116,67	95,39	21,27	190,79	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 847,54	\$ 24,41	\$ 14,93
30	158,10	117,34	40,76	234,67	\$ 29,85	\$ 3 502,45	\$ 22,15	\$ 14,93
31	122,63	92,40	30,24	184,79	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 758,05	\$ 22,49	\$ 14,93
32	215,43	185,69	29,74	371,38	\$ 29,85	\$ 5 542,85	\$ 25,73	\$ 14,93
33	104,93	82,02	22,91	164,04	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 448,30	\$ 23,33	\$ 14,93
34	108,87	81,47	27,40	162,94	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 431,88	\$ 22,34	\$ 14,93
35	91,32	100,29	(8,97)	200,58	\$ 33,93	\$ 3 402,81	\$ 37,26	\$ 16,97
36	118,48	85,83	32,65	171,67	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 678,04	\$ 22,60	\$ 15,60
37	89,48	76,93	12,55	153,87	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 400,31	\$ 26,82	\$ 15,60
38	92,23	76,90	15,34	153,79	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 399,20	\$ 26,01	\$ 15,60
39	112,22	80,35	31,87	160,70	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 506,90	\$ 22,34	\$ 15,60
40	109,18	77,84	31,34	155,68	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 428,60	\$ 22,24	\$ 15,60
41	99,58	75,96	23,62	151,93	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 370,07	\$ 23,80	\$ 15,60
42	118,33	84,38	33,95	168,76	\$ 31,20	\$ 2 632,70	\$ 22,25	\$ 15,60
43	84,45	79,41	5,04	158,83	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 370,53	\$ 28,07	\$ 14,93
44	115,20	83,65	31,55	167,30	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 497,01	\$ 21,68	\$ 14,93
45	106,98	77,58	29,40	155,17	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 315,91	\$ 21,65	\$ 14,93
46	97,02	76,53	20,48	153,07	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 284,56	\$ 23,55	\$ 14,93
47	129,22	105,58	23,64	211,16	\$ 29,85	\$ 3 151,50	\$ 24,39	\$ 14,93
48	108,23	92,40	15,83	184,80	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 758,15	\$ 25,48	\$ 14,93
49	129,07	89,60	39,47	179,20	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 674,57	\$ 20,72	\$ 14,93
50	88,43	77,57	10,86	155,15	\$ 29,85	\$ 2 315,60	\$ 26,18	\$ 14,93
Average	114,18	88,16	26,02	176,32		\$ 2 719,93	\$ 24,03	\$ 15,44