



NATIONAL MEDIATION BOARD

1301 K St NW, Suite 250E
Washington, DC, 20005

In the Matter of the
Application of the

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
MACHINISTS AND AEROSPACE
WORKERS

alleging a representation dispute
pursuant to Section 2, Ninth, of
the Railway Labor Act, as
amended

involving employees of

ALASKA AIRLINES, INC.

53 NMB No. 20

CASE NO. R-7672

FINDINGS UPON INVESTIGATION-
DISMISSAL

April 16, 2026

FINDINGS UPON INVESTIGATION

This determination addresses the application of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM) alleging a representation dispute pursuant to the Railway Labor Act (RLA), 45 U.S.C. § 152, Ninth (Section 2, Ninth),¹ among “Kitchen, Commissary, Catering & Related Employees” (KCCR Employees) at Alaska Airlines, Inc. (Alaska or Carrier).

For the reasons set forth below, the National Mediation Board (Board or NMB) concludes that the appropriate craft or class for the employees covered by the application is Lounge Employees, and dismisses the application.

PROCEDURAL BACKGROUND

On September 9, 2025, IAM filed an application alleging a representation dispute involving KCCR Employees at Alaska. At the time of the application, the

¹ 45 U.S.C. § 151, *et seq.*

employees were unrepresented. The application was given NMB Case No. R-7672 and Andres Yoder was assigned as the Investigator.

On October 14, 2025, Alaska submitted signature samples and the List of Potential Eligible Voters (List). Alaska also submitted its Initial Position Statement and supporting documents, including an affidavit from Alicia Wells, Alaska's Director of Lounge Products; and position descriptions for the jobs of Lounge Hospitality Host (Host), Concierge, Lounge On-Call (On-Call), and Airport Lounge Specialist (Specialist). On December 19, 2025, IAM submitted a Response to Alaska's Initial Position Statement, as well as supporting documents, including declarations from a number of Alaska employees, a United Airlines, Inc. employee, and an American Airlines, Inc. employee.

On December 29, 2025, Alaska submitted a Reply to IAM's Response, along with supporting documents, including a second declaration from Wells; a declaration from Sonia Alvarado, Alaska's Managing Director, Labor Relations, Ground; and a declaration from Anika Jackson, Alaska's Director of Lounge Operations. On January 9, 2025, IAM submitted a Rebuttal to Alaska's Reply and supporting documents, including declarations from several Alaska employees, and a video of a portion of a June 29, 2021 Alaska town hall.

ISSUE

What is (or are) the appropriate craft or class (or crafts or classes) for the employees covered by the application?

CONTENTIONS

According to IAM, the employees covered by the application belong in Alaska's KCCR Employees craft or class, which is composed of Hosts and On-Calls who spend a preponderant amount of their time working as Hosts.

Alaska agrees that its Hosts and On-Calls are covered by the application, but argues that they cannot be separated from a broader group it calls Lounge Employees—which includes Hosts, On-Calls, Concierges, and Specialists.

FINDINGS OF LAW

Determination of the issues in this case is governed by the RLA, as amended, 45 U.S.C. § 151, *et seq.* Accordingly, the Board finds as follows:

I.

Alaska is a common carrier as defined in 45 U.S.C. § 181.

II.

IAM is a labor organization and/or representative as provided by 45 U.S.C. § 151, Sixth, and § 152, Ninth.

III.

45 U.S.C. § 152, Fourth, gives employees subject to its provisions “the right to organize and bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing. The majority of any craft or class of employees shall have the right to determine who shall be the representative of the craft or class for the purposes of this chapter.”

IV.

45 U.S.C. § 151, Fifth, defines employee as “[E]very person in the service of a carrier (subject to its continuing authority to supervise and direct the manner of rendition of his service) who performs any work defined as that of an employee or subordinate official in the orders of the Surface Transportation Board now in effect”

V.

45 U.S.C. § 152, Ninth, provides that the Board has the duty to investigate representation disputes and shall designate who may participate as eligible voters in the event an election is required.

STATEMENT OF FACTS

Alaska is an air carrier with headquarters in SeaTac, Washington. Along with its wholly-owned subsidiary Horizon Air and partner SkyWest Airlines, Alaska runs an extensive route network that includes international destinations.

Alaska operates eight airport clubs at five airports called “Alaska Lounges” (Lounges). The Lounges offer Alaska customers Wi-Fi, televisions, seating options, tables, and food and beverage options. At the Lounges, Alaska customers can also get assistance with Lounge memberships and day passes, and they can make travel inquiries.

The List identifies 431 Lounge Employees—119 Hosts, 173 Concierges, 105 On-Calls, and 34 Specialists—who performed the following duties as of the August 29, 2025 cut-off date:

- **Hosts** are “[r]esponsible for coordinating the setup of food and beverage stations, preparing and serving barista-style beverages, serving beer, wines and spirits at the bar, preparing and serving meals, and maintaining the

- cleanliness and inventory of airport lounges”
- **Concierges** are “responsible for checking in lounge guests, resolving guest inquiries and assisting with travel arrangements, and serving drinks and meals”
 - **On-Calls** are “responsible for fulfilling the . . . Host and Concierge duties as needed” In a given shift, On-Calls generally perform either Host work or Concierge work, but not both.
 - **Specialists** are “responsible for handling complex, escalated member and guest inquiries, . . . delivering guidance and mentorship to other lounge employees[, and m]onitor[ing] operational workflows within all lounge areas and provid[ing] operational coverage as needed.” Some Specialists have more focused roles like Administrative Specialists, Training Specialists, or Food and Beverage Specialists.

Lounge Employees are all covered by Alaska’s Lounge Employee Handbook, which applies only to employees working in Alaska’s Lounge program. The Lounge Employee Handbook addresses scheduling and overtime; rules of conduct; timekeeping, attendance, and reliability; performance management; badging; and uniforms. Concierges, Hosts, and On-Calls all have the same uniform requirements. Specialists, meanwhile, wear business-casual attire, but wear uniforms when they fill in for Concierges or Hosts.

Lounge Employees are all evaluated on their ability to make cocktails and/or barista-style beverages, as well as on food preparation, service skills, and other hospitality-related skills. Additionally, they all receive new-hire and recurrent training that is specific to their particular Lounge. They work in Lounges only; they use break areas exclusive to Lounge Employees; and they do not interchange job duties with other Alaska employees. Hosts can be promoted to Concierges, and Concierges can be promoted to Specialists.

Aside from On-Calls, Lounge Employees are subject to the same wage scale, with variations in starting wages based on the position and the employee’s experience. On-Calls follow the Concierge wage scales, or are higher, depending on the location. At some airports, Alaska supplements pay to meet airport wage thresholds. Lounge Employees are eligible for holiday pay, while On-Calls receive holiday pay only for holidays on which they work. Aside from On-Calls, Lounge Employees receive the same benefits, including medical, dental, and vision insurance; health savings accounts; flexible spending accounts; short- and long-term disability; and so on.

All Lounge Employees report to Lounge Supervisors and Lounge Managers, who are responsible for day-to-day Lounge operations. Lounge Supervisors and Lounge Managers report to the Director, Lounge Operations—Jackson—who in turn reports to the Managing Director, Guest Experience—Tazeen Lalani. Lounge Supervisors, Lounge Managers, or Specialists can determine when to activate an inclement weather plan.

Concierges regularly interact with Customer Service Agents and Reservations Sales Agents, who assist customers with flight arrangements. Two Customer Service Agents at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport state that they interact with Concierges several times per week, normally when customers in the Lounge ask for help with travel-related issues. Additionally, a Reservations Sales Agent at Boise Airport maintains that they interact with Concierges when customers in the Lounge require “reservation expertise and/or coordination beyond what can be offered inside” the Lounge.

Specialists, unlike other Lounge Employees, have dedicated office space. Specialists enforce appearance and conduct standards, provide instruction, and address performance issues. They coordinate inventory logistics, and, when a Lounge Manager or Lounge Supervisor is not available, they act in the Lounge Manager’s or Lounge Supervisor’s place. During a June 29, 2021 town hall, Wells described Specialists as an “extension of [the] leadership team”; and noted that they “mak[e] sure [Lounges] are staffed appropriately” and “rearrang[e] team members in terms of rotations or shifts.” Wells further indicated that Specialists reach out to On-Calls and assign them their duties for the day. Moreover, during the town hall, an unidentified Alaska employee described Specialists as responding to needs as they arise, like restocking food and liquor.

Specialists cannot grant or authorize overtime; cannot authorize the expenditure of Alaska funds;² and cannot create Alaska policy. But like other Lounge Employees, Specialists may provide feedback on policy changes. Specialists do not hire Lounge Employees; do not lead job interviews; do not discipline Lounge Employees or effectively recommend discipline; and do not participate in evaluations of non-probationary employees or decisions concerning promotions. Like other Lounge Employees, however, Specialists may provide feedback on promotions and evaluations. Further, Specialists may evaluate probationary employees after 30 or 60 days, but after 90 days Lounge Managers and Lounge Supervisors decide whether an employee will pass probation.

DISCUSSION

Eligibility of Specialists

Before addressing the appropriate craft or class for the involved employees, it is necessary to determine whether Specialists are management officials who are ineligible to vote in any election, as argued by IAM. Under Section 9.211 of the

² An Alaska Host stated in a declaration that Specialists “can approve minor expenditures for guest amenities—where there is a special occasion (birthday or anniversary) we have been advised that a Specialist can approve items for reimbursement.” Wells, however, stated in her own declaration that “Specialists cannot authorize expenditure of carrier funds. . . . [They] have no spending authority.” Given Wells’s expertise in Alaska Lounge operations, her statement is given more weight.

NMB Representation Manual (Manual), management officials are not eligible to vote as part of any craft or class. Manual Section 9.211 defines management officials to

include individuals with:

- (1) the authority to dismiss and/or discipline employees or to effectively recommend the same;
- (2) the authority to supervise;
- (3) the ability to authorize and grant overtime;
- (4) the authority to transfer and/or establish assignments;
- (5) the authority to create carrier policy; and,
- (6) the authority to commit carrier funds.

The Investigator also considers:

- (1) whether the authority exercised is circumscribed by operating and policy manuals;
- (2) the placement of the individual in the organizational hierarchy of the carrier; and,
- (3) any other relevant factors regarding the individual's duties and responsibilities.

When evaluating managerial authority, the Board evaluates the above factors cumulatively. *See, e.g., Southwest Airlines*, 38 NMB 87, 98 (2011).

The record shows that Specialists are not management officials. Specialists do not discipline or effectively recommend discipline of Lounge Employees. They cannot authorize or grant overtime, cannot create Alaska policy, and cannot commit carrier funds. Specialists do not lead job interviews, do not hire Lounge Employees, and do not participate in evaluations of non-probationary employees or decisions concerning promotions. In addition, Specialists do not determine whether an employee will pass probation. Specialists' placement in Alaska's organizational hierarchy also weighs against a finding that they are management officials. Like other Lounge Employees, Specialists report to Lounge Supervisors and Lounge Managers, who are responsible for daily Lounge operations. Lounge Supervisors and Lounge Managers, in turn, report to Jackson, who reports to Lalani.

Specialists have some leadership responsibilities—including with respect to Lounge Employees' appearance, conduct, and performance. Specialists also play a key role in the coordination of staffing, by, among other things, ensuring that Lounges are properly staffed, contacting On-Calls when they are needed, and assigning On-Calls their duties for the day. Additionally, like other Lounge Employees, Specialists may provide feedback on Alaska policy and about promotions and evaluations. Along with Lounge Managers and Lounge

Supervisors, Specialists also participate in the evaluation of probationary employees. Nevertheless, when the Manual Section 9.211 factors are viewed cumulatively, the record does not support a finding that Specialists are management officials.

In arguing that Specialists are management officials, IAM points to language in the Specialists' job description; information from the Lounge Employee Handbook; statements from Lounge Employees; and comments from a town hall. While it is true that the Specialist job is a leadership position and that aspects of the job separate it from other Lounge Employees jobs, based on the Manual Section 9.211 factors, Specialists are not management officials.

The Appropriate Craft or Class (or Crafts of Classes)

“The Board has frequently stated its policy against fragmenting crafts or classes, and, indeed, recognizes that it is not authorized to make a determination for a unit smaller than the entire craft or class.” *American Airlines*, 21 NMB 60, 72 (1993). As a result, in considering the appropriate craft or class or crafts or classes for the Lounge Employees, the Board must first decide whether any of the four Lounge Employees jobs can be evaluated in isolation. If not—that is, if multiple jobs appropriately belong in the same craft or class—then the Board must make a craft-or-class finding that keeps the jobs together. *See Erie-Lackawanna R.R.*, 4 NMB 296, 299 (1967) (noting that the Board “avoid[s] splitting or fragmenting homogeneous groupings of employees”).

In determining the appropriate craft or class for employees, the Board is guided by Manual Section 9.1, which states:

In craft or class determinations, the NMB considers many factors, including the composition and relative permanency of employee groupings along craft or class lines; the functions, duties, and responsibilities of the employees; the general nature of their work; and the extent of community of interest existing between job classifications. Previous decisions of the NMB are also taken into account.

See, e.g., PSA Airlines, 52 NMB 51, 54 (2024). The factor of work-related community of interest is particularly important. *See, e.g., United Airlines*, 52 NMB 97, 105 (2025). To evaluate this factor, the Board examines the actual duties and responsibilities of the employees, the environment in which the employees work, and the interaction among the employees involved. *See, e.g., United Airlines*, 52 NMB 13, 20 (2024). The purpose of the community of interest test is to ensure that a particular grouping of employees “possess[es] a sufficiently distinct community of interest and commonality of functional characteristics to ensure a mutuality of interest in the objective of collective bargaining.” *Delta Air Lines*, 26 NMB 391, 406 (1999). The Board makes craft or class determinations case by case, based upon

Board policy and precedent. *See, e.g., Great Lakes Central R.R.*, 52 NMB 89, 92 (2025).

The record shows that all Lounge Employees share a work-related community of interest. Specialists play a critical role in the implementation of overall Lounge operations, and their responsibilities directly connect them to the other Lounge Employees. They coordinate staffing in Lounges by, among other things, ensuring appropriate staffing; contacting On-Calls when they are needed; and assigning On-Calls their duties for the day. Specialists may also cover for Hosts and Concierges, and take care of Lounge needs as they arise—such as restocking food and liquor. Specialists guide, mentor, and instruct other Lounge Employees; and they are responsible for ensuring that other Lounge Employees follow appearance and conduct standards.

On-Calls' and Concierges' job duties also demonstrate that Lounge Employees share a work-related community of interest. On-Calls may fill in for both Hosts and Concierges. Similarly, Concierges are required, at times, to perform the same food-and-beverage-service functions that Hosts perform. Moreover, all Lounge Employees are evaluated on their abilities with respect to food-and-beverage-service tasks. In contrast to Specialists', On-Calls', and Concierges' shared and interchangeable job duties, Lounge Employees do not interchange job duties with other Alaska employees.

In addition to sharing job duties, Lounge Employees may move between jobs. Hosts can be promoted to Concierges; and Concierges can be promoted to Specialists. Further, Alaska's Lounge Employee Handbook covers all Lounge Employees, and applies only to employees working in Alaska's Lounge program. Lounge Employees, moreover, all receive training that is specific to their particular Lounge. Lounge Employees are also subject to the same wage scale, and—aside from On-Calls—receive the same benefits. Finally, Lounge Employees all work in Lounges and use break rooms that are exclusive to them; and they all work toward the general purpose of providing customers with comfort and convenience before they board their flights.

Because the Lounge Employees share a work-related community of interest, work in the same environment, and share a general purpose, they appropriately belong in the same craft or class. The only remaining question is, to which craft or class do the Lounge Employees appropriately belong?

In the past, the Board has included Lounge Employees' duties—or comparable duties—in the Passenger Service Employees craft or class, in food-and-beverage-service-related crafts or classes, and in the Fleet Service Employees craft or class.

In *United Airlines*, 6 NMB 180 (1977), the Board described the Passenger Service Employees craft or class as being composed of employees who “most

directly service . . . customers' immediate requirements for flight arrangements." *Id.* at 186; *see also Southwest Airlines*, 42 NMB 110, 114-116 (2015) (discussing *United Airlines* and the Passenger Service Employees craft or class). The "principal responsibilities" of employees in the craft or class, the Board continued, include tasks like answering questions about routes, schedules, and prices; accepting and confirming reservations; directing customers to check-in counters and gates; computing fares; issuing tickets; processing payments and refunds; recording passengers' information; and assisting customers who are experiencing flight irregularities. *United Airlines*, *above* at 185. The Board also stated that the Passenger Service Employees craft or class includes employees who "service[] . . . pre-flight lounges[,]" *id.*, but did not describe what that work entails.

Unlike the Board's task-by-task description of the Passenger Service Employees craft or class in *United Airlines*, the Board's decisions concerning the appropriate crafts or classes for food-and-beverage-service-related work do not identify any clear-cut criteria.³ In 2000, for instance, the Board described the KCCR Employees craft or class at Gate Gourmet as including "employees who provide catering kitchen services to air and rail carriers." *Dobbs International Services, Inc. d/b/a Gate Gourmet*, 28 NMB 7, 9 (2000). A few years earlier, the Board described some of the work performed by employees in the In-Flight Kitchen and Commissary Employees craft or class at LSG Lufthansa Services somewhat differently. The work included tasks like ensuring that food and equipment is correctly loaded onto airplanes; preparing food and supervising the preparation of food; and being responsible for "bar set, cutlery, and equipment prep." *LSG Lufthansa Services*, 25 NMB 96, 103-07, 113-14 (1997). And in 1977, the Board described the Flight Kitchen Personnel and Cafeteria Employees craft or class at Northwest Airlines in distinct terms as well. The craft or class included individuals who prepare and pack food; who place "food and equipment on airplanes"; and who work at employee cafeterias. *Northwest Airlines*, 6 NMB 105, 105-07 (1977).

Further, in a number of jurisdictional disputes, the Board has stated, without elaboration, that in-flight food catering work is traditionally part of the Flight Kitchen and Commissary Employees craft or class. *See LSG Sky Chefs*, 27 NMB 55, 62 (1999); *Nikko Inflight Catering Co.*, 19 NMB 434, 436 (1992); *Chelsea Catering Corp.*, 19 NMB 301, 304 (1992); *SAPADO I/Dobbs International Services, Inc.*, 20 NMB 525, 529 (1991); *Sky Chefs, Inc.*, 15 NMB 397, 403 (1988).

³ In at least six cases, the Board conducted elections among crafts or classes with names similar or comparable to KCCR Employees, but did not discuss the duties of the employees who fell into those crafts or classes. *See United Airlines*, 46 NMB 4 (2018) (involving the Flight Kitchen, Commissary, Catering and Related Employees craft or class); *Aramark Rail Services*, 36 NMB 98 (2009) (involving the Kitchen, Commissary, and Related Employees craft or class); *LSG Lufthansa Services*, 27 NMB 214 (2000) (involving In-Flight Kitchen and Commissary Employees); *Hacor, Inc.*, 26 NMB 460 (1999) (involving Flight Kitchen and Commissary Employees); *International In-Flight Catering Co.*, 9 NMB 191 (1982) (involving Flight Kitchen and Commissary Employees); *Antilles Air Boats*, 8 NMB 20 (1980) (involving Commissary Employees).

Finally, the Board has repeatedly included commissary work—that is, work that often has to do with loading food onto airplanes; controlling inventory and liquor; and so on—in the Fleet Service Employees craft or class. *See America West Airlines*, 22 NMB 54, 65, 68 (1994); *El Al Israel Airlines*, 12 NMB 282, 282-83 (1985); *Alitalia Airlines*, 9 NMB 200, 227 (1982); *Air Florida*, 7 NMB 393, 393 (1980). A couple of older cases similarly connected commissary work to crafts or classes that included fleet service work. *See El Al Israel Airlines*, 6 NMB 833, 833 (1979) (involving Fleet and Passenger Service Employees); *National Airlines, et al.*, 1 NMB 444, 445 (1947) (involving Clerical, Office, Stores, Fleet, and Passenger Service Employees).

As a group, the Lounge Employees’ job duties do not fit neatly into any traditional craft or class. Lounge Employees handle customers’ flight arrangements, which is work that is routinely included in the Passenger Service Employees craft or class. They also regularly interact with Customer Service Agents and Reservations Sales Agents, who perform work that is normally part of the Passenger Service Employees craft or class. Moreover, Lounge Employees prepare and serve food and beverages, which is comparable to work the Board has placed in food-and-beverage-service-related crafts or classes. And Lounge Employees restock food and liquor, which is similar to work the Board has included in both food-and-beverage-service-related crafts or classes and in the Fleet Service Employees craft or class.

Because the Lounge Employees’ job duties uniquely combine elements from multiple crafts or classes, and because the Lounge Employees share a unique and strong community of interest, the Board is persuaded that, at Alaska, it is appropriate to recognize a craft or class of Lounge Employees that includes Hosts, Concierges, On-Calls, and Specialists. *See also, e.g., Bauxite & Northern Ry.*, 44 NMB 7, 12-13 (2017) (recognizing a combined craft or class of Operating and Non-Operating Employees); *Regional Elite Airline Services*, 38 NMB 299, 315 (2011) (recognizing a combined craft or class of Fleet and Passenger Service Employees); *Federal Express Corp.*, 22 NMB 215, 220 (1995) (determining that a group of employees that was “distinct from” two traditional crafts or classes “constitute[d] a separate craft or class”); *Erie-Lackawanna R.R.*, 4 NMB 296, 299 (1967) (recognizing a “unique group” that was “entitled to representation . . . as a . . . unit”).

IAM makes three arguments against the idea that the Lounge Employees all belong in the same craft or class.⁴ First, IAM argues that *Erie-Lackawanna Railroad, above* does not support the recognition of a Lounge Employees craft or

⁴ Both IAM and Alaska submitted arguments concerning voter eligibility as of the cut-off date (challenges), as well as voter eligibility after the cut-off date (status changes). Consistent with its routine practice, however, the Board in this case declines to address challenges or status changes in the absence of an election authorization. *See generally* Manual Section 8.1 (addressing schedules for challenges); Manual Section 12.3 (“The participants must advise the Investigator of any changes in employee status during the election period.”).

class. As in *Erie-Lackawanna Railroad*, however, the Board in this case has identified a unique group that is entitled to representation as a unit. *See id.* at 299. Second, IAM maintains that craft-or-class determinations should rely on actual duties and work-related communities of interest. Here, however, the Board has considered those factors. Third, IAM contends that Concierges and some On-Calls should not be grouped with other Lounge Employees because they perform passenger-service functions. The Board, however, takes a case-by-case approach to craft-or-class determinations, *see, e.g., Great Lakes Central R.R.*, 52 NMB 89, 92 (2025), and in this case the Board has determined that the Lounge Employees all belong in Alaska's Lounge Employees craft or class.

CONCLUSION

The Board finds that Hosts, Concierges, On-Calls, and Specialists are all part of Alaska's Lounge Employees craft or class. The Board further finds that IAM has failed to support its application with the required number of authorizations from employees in the craft or class. *See generally* 45 U.S.C. § 152, Twelfth; 29 C.F.R. § 1206.2(a). Therefore, the Board finds no basis upon which to proceed in this matter and the application is hereby dismissed.

By direction of the NATIONAL MEDIATION BOARD.



Maria-Kate Dowling
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