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## **Consumer Groups Pressure White House Over Family Seating on Planes**

By Rich Thomaselli

*IdeaWorksCompany contributed information to this article - - see italics.*

Consumer advocates are pressuring the Biden Administration to have the Department of Transportation revisit its decision on how families are split up while traveling on airplanes.

The DOT ruled two years ago that airlines are required to make sure that children 13 and under can sit next to a family member at no additional cost.

For some families, especially those traveling with a basic economy ticket, paying extra fees for advanced seating assignments can become costly.

"The department is looking into this matter again to determine what other action(s) should be taken," a DOT spokeswoman told Travel Weekly.

On their websites, airlines tell families to check in to their flights as soon as they are eligible and to arrive at the airport early, and gate agents will try to seat families together. If that fails, flight attendants will do the same.

"U.S. airlines work to accommodate customers traveling together, especially those traveling with children, and will continue to do so," the trade group Airlines for America said.

But for some, that's not enough. Bill McGee, the aviation advisor for Consumer Reports, and Charlie Leocha, head of the consumer group Travelers United, both met with DOT Secretary Pete Buttigieg.

"I'd say he's really on our side," Leocha said. "However, he still has to go through his worker bees. He made no commitments whatsoever, just that he'd look at it."

***Meanwhile, consumer advocates aren't the only ones who say airlines need to do more to put families at ease. A study released in June by the firm IdeaWorks, which consults airlines on how to boost ancillary revenue, noted the rapid embrace of seat assignment fees by global, full-service carriers in recent years.***

***IdeaWorks president Jay Sorensen also pointed out that charging for seat assignments can cause consumer confusion, especially as it relates to family travel. Often, he added, airlines do a poor job of disclosing their rules for paid seat assignments, including cancellation and refund policies.***

***"I am an advocate for ancillary revenue, but it needs to be ancillary revenue done smartly and correctly," Sorensen said. "Too often, in their rush for ancillary revenue, airlines are remiss in dotting every I and crossing every T."***