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February 23, 2023

The Honorable Pete Buttigieg
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Buttigieg,

I write to express my longstanding concerns about the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's (FMCSA) policies and procedures for handling moving fraud. Over the last seven years, the FMCSA has seen an increase in the number of complaints regarding moving fraud – and in 2022, the number of complaints regarding Household Goods (HHG) was more than double that of 2015.¹ Many of these complaints involve Connecticut residents. The FMCSA must use all of its authorities to enforce penalties against bad actors and protect consumers from widespread fraud, extortion, and theft within the moving industry.

Moving fraud takes many forms – from deliberately underestimating a moving cost to misrepresenting a package's weight and more. But one of the most egregious moving frauds perpetrated against consumers is a hostage load, which occurs when a mover refuses to relinquish a consumer's goods until the consumer agrees to pay a revised cost of moving that is significantly higher than the initial, agreed-upon estimate. There have been tragic reports of movers extorting thousands of dollars from consumers in return for their possessions.² These fraudsters can make moving – an already stressful experience for any consumer – a nightmare.

I am encouraged that the FMCSA already considers moving fraud – and hostage load complaints specifically – a priority. I appreciate the agency's efforts to educate the public on moving fraud to try to prevent its occurrence. I also appreciate the investigatory steps the FMCSA takes in response to complaints – but it is clear investigations alone are insufficient to protect consumers. While I understand the FMCSA is limited in the penalties it can assess without the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), such limitations do not preclude tough enforcement or referrals to DOJ for further action. Indeed, tough enforcement of the law will be a strong deterrent to the widespread fraud perpetuated currently on consumers.

¹ Data from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's National Consumer Complaint Database, provided in briefing to staff, January 12, 2023, <https://nccdb.fmcsa.dot.gov/nccdb/home.aspx>.

² Herb Weisbaum, "When you're moving interstate, beware the scammers," *Washington Post* (Washington, D.C.), August 4, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/home/when-youre-moving-interstate-beware-the-scammers/2020/08/03/3ae251c0-d0d7-11ea-8c55-61e7fa5e82ab_story.html.

Given the serious consequences of moving fraud for consumers, I respectfully request a response to the following questions by March 23, 2023:

1. How many moving fraud complaints did FMCSA receive in the last two years? How many were specific to moving fraud?
2. Of the complaints in Question 1, how many complaints were resolved by the FMCSA – either before or through the investigatory process?
3. Of the complaints in Question 1, how many were referred to DOJ for further action? Of those, how many did DOJ choose to pursue?
4. Please outline the FMCSA’s referral process to DOJ for HHG and moving fraud complaints.
5. How many full-time employees work in the FMCSA’s division investigating HHG complaints? Is this number sufficient? If not, please describe the FMCSA’s plans to hire additional staff.
6. The FMCSA already partners with state Attorneys General on enforcement activities. Please describe how such partnerships aid the FMCSA in investigating HHG and moving fraud complaints and enforcing penalties.
7. What, if any, current federal grant programs exist to aid the FMCSA in investigating HHG and moving fraud complaints and enforcing penalties?
8. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA, Public Law 117-58) included a Government Accountability Office review of the FMCSA’s National Consumer Complaint Database (NCCD), including recommendations for improvements. Please provide an update on the status of this report.
9. How does FMCSA use its website and NCCD data to support the public in making informed decisions? Please describe any future outreach efforts.
10. Are there additional barriers the FMCSA faces when investigating moving fraud complaints or enforcing penalties against bad actors?

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to working with you and the FMCSA to prevent moving fraud and ensuring any fraudsters are held fully accountable going forward.

Sincerely,



Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate

CC: Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration