Air Traffic Controller Staffing: 2011-2023
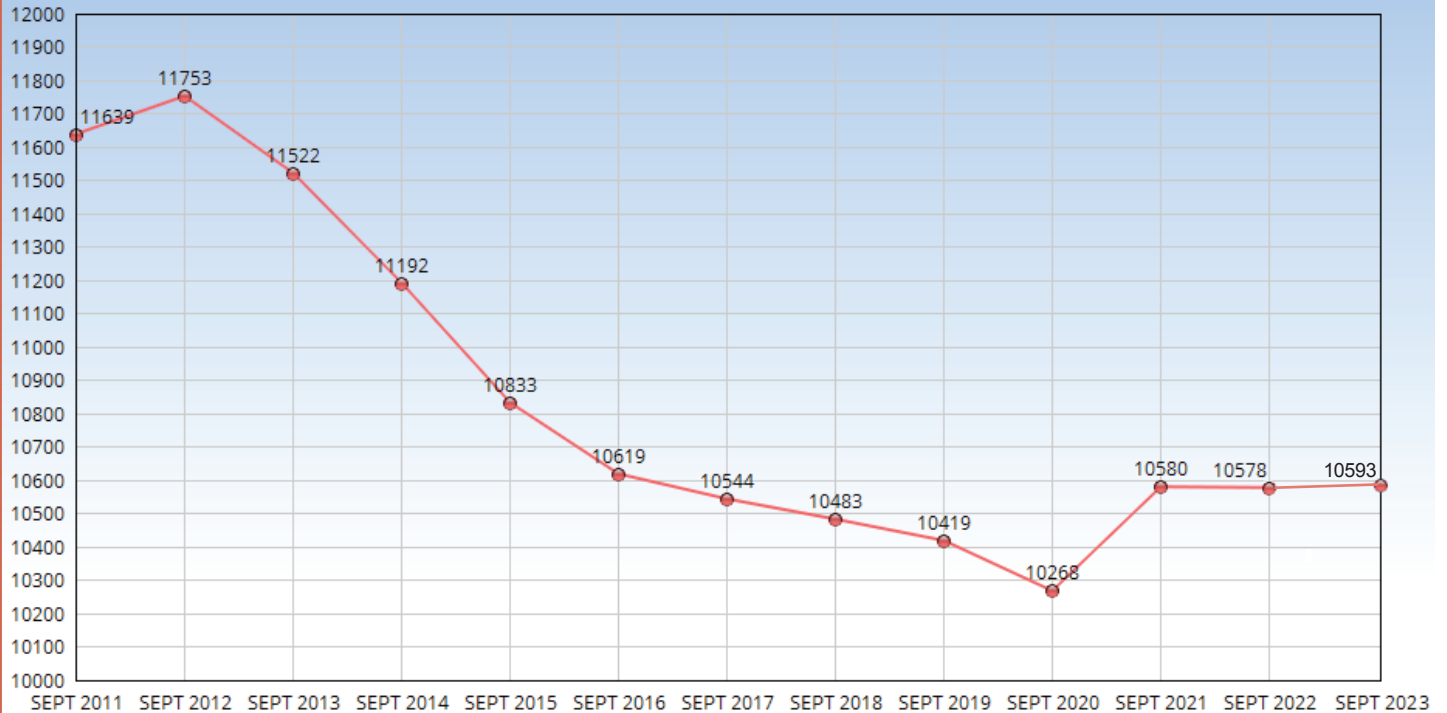
FISCAL YEAR	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
On-Board	15,236	15,063	14,461	14,059	14,010	14,050	14,009	14,285	14,193	13,830	13,715	13,418	13,448
CPC	11,639	11,753	11,522	11,192	10,833	10,619	10,544	10,483	10,419	10,268	10,580	10,578	10,593
CPC-IT	965	1,143	1,187	1,200	1,218	1,259	1,205	1,320	1,414	1,309	1,031	943	985
DEV (Including AG)	2,632	2,167	1,741	1,667	1,959	2,172	2,260	2,482	2,360	2,253	2,104	1,897	1,870
AG	676	671	440	665	936	878	883	980	882	873	917	643	762
Retirement Eligible	3,064	3,224	3,077	2,982	3,355	2,915	2,410	1,842	1,004	1,143	≈1,000	631	714
FAA Planned To Hire	829	981	1,315	1,286	1,772	1,619	1,781	1,701	1,431*	910	910**	1,020	1,500
FAA Actually Hired	824	925	554	1,112	1,345	1,680	1,880	1,786	1,010	920	510	1,026	1,514

Source: FAA Finance Staffing Data Snapshot

FAA reduced its FY 2019 hiring target from 1,431 to 907 following the 35-day government shutdown.

FAA reduced its FY 2021 hiring target from 910 to 500 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and increased its hiring targets for FY 2022 – 2024.

These data are prior to the Collaborative Resource Workgroup's recommendation to establish new CPC staffing targets for FAA's 313 air traffic control facilities.

CPC: Certified Professional Controller
CPC-IT: Certified Professional Controller in Training (fully certified elsewhere, transferred to a new facility and began training there)
DEV: Developmental (trainee)
AG: Graduate of the FAA Initial Classroom Training Academy in Oklahoma City, newly hired, and started at their first facility as a trainee

FAA must replace its Finance-driven Controller Workforce Plan with the Collaborative Resources Workgroup's operational CPC staffing targets developed by the FAA's Air Traffic Organization and NATCA and verified and validated by the MITRE Corporation's Center for Advanced Aviation System Development. FAA also must replace its hiring targets with maximum hiring for more than just the next five years in order to reach the CRWG's CPC targets.

- At the end of Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, FAA netted an additional 15 Certified Professional Controllers (CPCs) compared to the end of FY22.

- At the end of FY23, there were 1,160 fewer CPCs than there were at the end of FY12, a 10% decrease.

- CPC totals have remained essentially flat since end of FY16 despite the FAA meeting or exceeding its hiring targets nearly every year in that period. It's the FAA's annual hiring targets themselves that are the problem. They are set by FAA Office of Finance and Management, which has no knowledge or expertise on air traffic operations.

- Although FAA frequently touts the number of trainees in the system to counter the concern about the lack of CPCs, FAA netted only an additional 15 trainees at the end of FY23 compared to end of FY22 for a net total of 30 additional "on board" Air Traffic Control Specialists (ATCS).

- At the end of FY23, FAA had 2,855 ATCS in training, including 1,870 developmental stage trainees and 985 CPCs-in-training (CPC-ITs, who transferred to new facilities, but have not yet certified on the new airspace). At the end of FY18, FAA had 2,482 developmental stage trainees and 1,320 CPC-ITs for a total of 3,802 trainees. This decline of over 900 trainees means that the pipeline has dwindled and FAA is not making progress on hiring and training ATCS.

- In November 2023, the FAA's independent National Airspace System (NAS) Safety Review Team concluded that under FAA's most recent CWP submitted to Congress, "when retirements and other attrition is accounted for, the hiring plan produces a negligible improvement over today's understaffed levels, resulting in a net increase of fewer than 200 air traffic controllers by 2032." Considering FAA added only 15 new CPCs and 30 total "on board" ATCS in FY23, the NAS Safety Review Teams estimates are accurate.

- The Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General (DOT OIG) issued a report in June (AV2023035) that concluded "FAA continues to face staffing challenges and lacks a plan to address them, which in turn poses a risk to the continuity of air traffic operations." DOT OIG Audit Report at 6.

- FAA Finance's plan has been in place for over 15 years. It has led to the current staffing crisis and continuing to follow it will result in more of the same. A new approach is needed.