To the Honorable [insert Congress Member’s name here],

It has come to the attention of the Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) community that Senators Feinstein, Lee, Blumenthal, and Cotton are sponsors of a prospective bill, “Drone Federalism Act of 2017” as yet unnumbered, that if passed, has the potential to destroy the recreational and commercial UAS industry.

We comprise a large community based network of drone enthusiasts, makers, engineers, scientists, educators, and entrepreneurs. Our mission is to promote the safe and responsible use of small unmanned systems, and to educate the public about the positive role these devices can serve in our society.

We are witnessing a sea of change in how work gets done. The UAS (Unmanned Autonomous Systems) industry has seen tremendous growth in the last several years and is likely to alter the landscape of many business sectors including shipping and logistics, personal transportation, agriculture, GIS, survey and mapping, and cinematography to name just a few. Our nation has been at the forefront of innovation for more than a century.

As our society becomes more automated we must educate and train our students to work and thrive in a changing economy. By effectively proposing to outlaw civil drone use, our legislators are being extremely short-sighted as well as ill informed.

Let us not fall victim to fear mongering and “feel-good” legislation that will surely inhibit the growth of this nascent industry.

While Senator Feinstein, the author of the bill, may have good intentions in when it comes to her interpretation of how it will protect her constituents, the bill undermines the FAA’s authority over the National Airspace System (NAS) that keeps the flying public safe.

Her bill requires the FAA to give state, local, and tribal governments control over the first 200’ of airspace above private property, as well as airspace within 200’ of private property. While that may sound good on paper, it absolutely destroys our ability to fly for fun, and for business.

Among other things, it will allow local governments to require UAS operators to ask permission before we can fly 200’ over, or even within 200’ of, private property.

As of 2010, 80.7% of all Americans live in urban areas. Of that percentage, the vast majority live in neighborhoods with smaller lots. Very few lots are any where close to 200’ wide or deep. As such, if this bill passes, and a state adopted its language, every local UAS flight would require permission from multiple homeowners before each flight.

In looking on Google Maps, the chaos this would cause for anyone who flies in urban areas becomes even more evident. A quick look shows that a flight in that UAS operator’s own yard would mean they’d need permission from multiple neighbors to fly. And that’s just for a fun recreational flight over your own backyard. If you go beyond your yard, you’d have to get even more permissions. And what if all of the neighbors weren’t home. What then, you can’t fly?

This bill also has the likely potential to destroy the fledgling Commercial UAS industry. A commercial UAS pilot currently has to look at airspace designation, any temporary restrictions, airspace hazards, and possible airspace conflicts (hospital helipads for example) each and every time he or she accepts a job from a client. We prefer it that way, it’s our responsibility to keep the NAS safe too. However, if Senator Feinstein’s bill passes, we will have to add checking each and every locality we fly in to make sure we aren’t going to be breaking their local rules. If you’re near a city limit boundary, you have to see if you’re within 200’ of other adjacent cities, and check those additional ordinances. The possibility of violating a law we don’t know about, being arrested, and having our equipment confiscated is mind-boggling and very real.

This puts even more undue burden on an already well-regulated industry. For us to fly commercially we need an FAA Part 107 Remote Pilot Certificate. If this bill passes, it negates the rights we have to fly in that 200’ envelope. The vast majority of recreational and commercial UAS flights take place within this envelope. This will stop the industry in its tracks.

As mentioned, the UAS industry is in its infancy. We are just now starting to explore and expand the capabilities of just how drones can serve mankind in positive ways. We are already doing things with UAS that we hadn’t even thought of five years ago. Just imagine where we’ll be in another five years if we’re allowed to continue to develop this industry at this pace. It’s imperative that the FAA maintain 100% control of the NAS for that progress to continue.

Having to sit down with multiple jurisdictional subdivisions in order to fulfill the requirements of the “Drone Federalism Act of 2017” would mean siphoning agency resources, both monetary and human, away from where they are desperately needed in this critical time for the UAS Industry.

The UAS Industry cannot afford to have the FAA take those resources away from the current mission of the FAA UAS Integration Office. Pilots may decide it’s no longer viable to play by the rules. We agree that some rules are required and welcome the opportunity to comment and help craft regulation that we can agree on. Regulation that isn’t so onerous that we are forced to break the law in order to recreate or operate commercially.

We strongly encourage you to reach out to the four Senators listed above and encourage them to withdraw their bill prior to introduction. Should it be introduced, we strongly encourage you to vote “No” in order to protect an industry that has the potential for not only creating thriving industries and jobs, but saving lives as well.

Thank you for your consideration and time. If you or your staff has any questions, please do not hesitate to reach out and ask.

[Name and/or title if business]

[Business name]

[Remote Pilot Number if applicable]