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Dedicated to the Advancement of the International Helicopter Community

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Helicopter Association International Addresses National Transportation Board Findings on January 2020 Helicopter Crash in Calabasas, Calif.

Alexandria, Va. (February 9, 2021) – The staff of Helicopter Association International (HAI) followed the findings and recommendations of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) related to the Jan. 26, 2020, helicopter crash near Calabasas, California. HAI extends its deepest sympathies to those who lost a loved one in this accident and is committed to the goal of zero fatal accidents in the aviation industry. We also want to thank the men and women of the NTSB for their hard work in investigating this crash.

The NTSB concluded that the pilot's decision to continue visual flight rules (VFR) flight into instrument meteorological conditions (IMC), resulting in spatial disorientation and loss of control of the aircraft, was the probable cause of this helicopter crash. HAI agrees with this assessment and acknowledges the NTSB's contributing factors of the pilot's self-induced pressure and plan continuation bias, and Island Express's inadequate review and oversight of its safety management system (SMS) program. Regretfully, this appears to be yet another fatal accident caused by a string of human-factor deficiencies, including flawed aeronautical decision-making.

With human performance issues as a causal factor in the majority of aviation accidents, HAI believes that the best way to improve safety in our industry is by ensuring that the proper culture, systems, and training are available to our pilots, maintenance technicians, operators, and aviation professionals.

“Most accidents are caused not by aircraft issues, but by people making mistakes, not following procedures, making poor decisions, or as NTSB Chairman Robert Sumwalt stated, simply having SLOJ, Sudden Loss of Judgment. We can lower the industry accident rate significantly by addressing these human factors,” says James A. Viola, HAI president and CEO. “HAI continues to promote a 360-degree approach to reducing accidents, one that addresses culture, processes and training, and the appropriate use of technology to reduce aviation risk.”

In the 13 findings listed in its report on the accident, the NTSB included Finding #7, the pilot's decision to continue the flight because of self-induced pressure. As noted by NTSB Members Michael Graham and Bruce Landsberg, the HAI Land & LIVE program recommends that pilots facing deteriorating flight conditions, including weather, land the aircraft. “If the pilot had implemented Land & LIVE, this entire accident may have been prevented,” says Viola.

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“Over the past six months, with key stakeholders, HAI has completed a top-to-bottom review of our safety programs,” continues Viola. “We’ve strengthened our collaboration with industry partners and refocused our safety efforts on providing tangible resources for the helicopter community, including those targeted at helping pilots avoid or recover from IIMC, one of the leading causes of the accident discussed in today’s hearing.

“Tomorrow, HAI will release a comprehensive list of all safety programs—current and in development—that we produce alone or with our growing list of industry partners to support safety in our industry,” says Viola. “There are groups out there—HAI’s Safety Working Group, the US Helicopter Safety Team, the FAA Safety Team, and many others—who can help operators, pilots, and maintenance technicians improve their safety efforts. We have the tools to reduce accidents to zero—let’s use them.”

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HAI is the professional trade association for the international helicopter industry. HAI members represent more than 3,000 aviation businesses and individuals who safely operate more than 4,500 helicopters approximately 2.3 million hours each year in more than 73 nations. HAI is dedicated to the promotion of the helicopter as a safe, effective method of commerce and to the advancement of the international helicopter community.