

Frank B. Cummings

57 James Habersham
Beaufort, SC 29906

March 10, 2015

The Honorable Nikki R. Haley
Office of the Governor
1205 Pendleton Street
Columbia, SC 29201

Re: F-35B Safety Proposals

Dear Governor Haley:

I am writing to bring to your attention the need for several crucial safety measures at the Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort. These include an alternate landing field for the Air Station (*just endorsed by Beaufort City Council on March 9*), as well as a slight shift in the main flight patterns in and out of the base to place flights over open and unpopulated land. The importance of these measures was most recently validated by the February 22, 2015 crash of a F-18 at a training area in Georgia. This plane was stationed at MCAS Beaufort. Fortunately the crew ejected and no civilians or military personnel were seriously injured because the crash occurred in a remote training area.

AS you may be aware, the F-35B is a single engine, single pilot plane that has had a history of technical and operational issues in its development phase. Because the mission of MCAS Beaufort has changed to include two F-35B training squadrons, the annual flight operations at the Air Station are projected to increase to 106,000, up from roughly 30,000 flight operations that are presently being flown annually. Accordingly, the risk of accident in the surrounding communities may well increase significantly as these training operations ramp up.

MCAS Beaufort is the only air station housing the F-35B that does not have an alternative landing field. This base will not only be training the Marine but also allied pilots from other countries. At the least, Northern Beaufort County warrants the same consideration as other communities who have reduced risk due to the establishment of an alternative landing field. The risk of taking no action is real.

Please escalate the process to approve and make operational an alternative landing field for MCAS Beaufort. For additional safety reasons, serious consideration also should be given to conducting a majority of departures and arrivals over areas that are generally unpopulated. Such options exist and should be explored.

I am hopeful that you can begin now to help address these safety concerns of those in Northern Beaufort County residents most directly impacted by the expanded mission of the Air Station.

Sincerely,

