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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**AOPA Announces Leadership Transition as CEO Moves to Advisory Role**

*Mission, advocacy, and member services continue uninterrupted*

FREDERICK, Md., February 4, 2026—The Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association (AOPA) today announced a leadership transition as President and CEO Darren Pleasance steps out of the day-to-day CEO role and into an advisory capacity to support AOPA and the Board of Trustees during the search for AOPA’s next leader.

Over time, it's become increasingly clear that the AOPA CEO role should be based full-time in Frederick, Maryland, at AOPA’s headquarters. The AOPA Board appreciates the substantial time Darren has spent traveling from his home in Bend, Oregon, to be present in Frederick and with members across the country. Recognizing this, now is the right time to transition leadership in a way that best supports the organization’s long-term needs.

“Darren has brought energy, perspective, and a deep commitment to serving pilots and protecting the freedom to fly,” said Jim Hauslein, Chairman of the AOPA Board of Trustees. “He has been deeply engaged with our members across the country, taking time to listen to their experiences, understand their challenges, and represent their voices in the work we do every day. We are grateful for his leadership and are pleased he will continue to support AOPA during this transition.”

“I’m incredibly proud of what we were able to set in motion at AOPA in a relatively short period of time,” Pleasance said. “In addition, I had the opportunity to meet thousands of members across the country, hear their stories, and work on issues that matter to everyday pilots, which has been deeply meaningful. The most special part of AOPA, though, is the staff. The people here care deeply about pilots and the mission, and it’s been a privilege to work alongside them.”

Effective immediately, AOPA's day-to-day operations will be jointly led by Chief Financial Officer Jill Baker and Senior Vice President of Membership Strategy and Growth Katie Pribyl, who will serve as Acting Co-Presidents during this interim period. Both are members of AOPA's executive leadership team and will lead the organization's operations, staff, and strategic execution, ensuring continuity of leadership and decision-making across the association.

AOPA's leadership team and staff remain fully focused on the work pilots rely on every day, including advocacy at all levels of government, advancing aviation safety and training, and delivering trusted member programs and services as the Board conducts a thoughtful search for AOPA's next leader.

The AOPA Board of Trustees will initiate a formal search shortly for the next President and CEO. The process will be designed to be thoughtful, inclusive, and aligned with the long-term needs of AOPA's members and the general aviation community.

Earlier this week, AOPA announced GA visionary Dale Klapmeier, co-founder and former CEO of Cirrus Aircraft, has been appointed to the AOPA Board of Trustees. Klapmeier's decades of leadership in advancing aircraft safety, innovation, and pilot engagement add important industry perspective to the Board. Additional details about his appointment were shared in a separate [announcement](#) on Monday.

#### ABOUT AOPA

Since 1939, AOPA has protected the freedom to fly by creating an environment that gives people of all ages the opportunity to enjoy aviation and all it has to offer. AOPA is the world's largest community of pilots, aircraft owners, and aviation enthusiasts with representatives based in Frederick, Md.; Washington, D.C.; and seven regions across the United States. The association provides member services including advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels; legal services; flight training and safety programs; and award-winning media. AOPA specializes in making aviation more accessible to everyone. To learn more, visit [www.aopa.org](http://www.aopa.org).

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