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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6250

May 7, 2003

The Honorable Asa Hutchinson
Under Secretary for Border and Transportation Security
Department of Homeland Security
3801 Nebraska Avenue, N.W.
Washington DC 20528

Dear Secretary Hutchinson:

I am writing to express my concern over the way in which the Transportation Security Administration is implementing cutbacks in the airline security screener workforce, particularly at the Portland (ME) International Jetport. While I understand that the TSA may need to make some cutbacks to its workforce, the TSA should take into account the impact of workforce reductions on specific airports and their ability to screen passengers effectively and efficiently.

It is my understanding that the TSA will be eliminating 30 screener positions at the Portland International Jetport. These positions represent almost 30 percent of the screener force at the Jetport. This reduction is especially noteworthy when one considers that 184 airports had either an increase in screeners or no change in screener workforce, and that the average reduction in workforce among airports was 12.6 percent.

Of greater concern than the raw numbers, however, is the fact that the TSA apparently based its decision to reduce the number of passenger screeners at the Jetport on out-of-date information. Apparently, TSA reached the determination that Portland needs only 40 passenger screeners based on the assumption that Portland has only two authorized screening lanes. Since January 2003, however, Portland has been operating a third lane with TSA's authorization. This lane was added because of the substantial delays that passengers in Portland were experiencing. If the proposed cutbacks at the Portland Jetport are fully implemented, they will likely require that the third screening lane be shut down. Moreover, these cuts will also be occurring at the precise time that Portland experiences its peak passenger traffic. The manager of the Portland Jetport has estimated that this will cause passenger delays of up to 45 minutes.

I would ask that you allow the Portland Jetport to retain an appropriate number of passenger screeners based on the number of screening lanes it currently needs and is

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authorized to use by the TSA, which is three. If there is anything that I can do to assist in these efforts, please let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Susan Collins". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Susan M. Collins
Chairman