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Secretary Mineta Applauds Legal Action, Assigns Team To Philadelphia Airport

WASHINGTON – U.S. Secretary of Transportation Norman Y. Mineta praised Thursday’s actions by the Justice Department seeking to revoke the probation of Argenbright, Inc., a security screening firm operating at Philadelphia International Airport, and assigned a special enforcement team to the airport.

Assistant U.S. Attorney John Pease on Thursday petitioned the U.S. District Court in Philadelphia to order Argenbright officials to a hearing to answer charges that they continue to violate an earlier court order regarding the hiring of screeners without appropriate background checks or training.

“The action taken today against Argenbright is further evidence of this Administration’s commitment to the safety and security of the traveling public,” said Secretary Mineta. “I want to thank and congratulate the members of the Department of Justice, the U.S. Attorney’s Office of Philadelphia, the Transportation Department’s Office of Inspector General, and other participating law enforcement agencies, for collectively underscoring the government’s resolve in enforcing the vital security regulations of our national aviation system.”

To insure that the traveling public continues to receive the proper level of safety, Secretary Mineta has assigned a special Security Assessment Team to Philadelphia Airport. Comprised of a Federal Security Manager from the FAA and agents from the DOT Office of Inspector General, the team will scrutinize screening operations and enforce federal standards. The team will insure that the court's compliance order is adhered to, with specific focus on verifying background checks and employee training.

Today’s announcement is the culmination of an investigation initiated by the Department of Transportation’s Office of the Inspector General (OIG) in January 1999, after receiving allegations from FAA inspectors that Argenbright had falsified background investigations at Philadelphia International Airport (PHL).

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, the Department of Transportation has also implemented a series of directives aimed at strengthening passenger security, and is currently working with Congress to pass legislation that will, as part of a comprehensive package, place the security and screening process at all airports under federal management and control.