

Statement of

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Good morning Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today to address the challenges facing the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) workforce. To better understand those challenges, first and foremost, it is critical that we not only remember, but also appreciate why TSA was created and the enormous challenges facing the men and women of TSA every day as we carry out our security mission.

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, TSA was stood up to secure our transportation systems. Since TSA's inception, there have been repeated unsuccessful attempts to attack our aviation system—the liquid explosives plot in 2006, the Christmas Day underwear bombing attempt in 2009, the cargo explosive attempt in 2010, and the renewed threat of explosives concealed on the body this year. The threat to aviation is real, and we use intelligence, technology and partnerships with law enforcement across the country and around the world to stay ahead of threats and ensure our workforce is prepared to address them.

Our Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) serve on the frontline of our layered security system and screen approximately 1.8 million people who travel from 450 airports each day. Both in the field and at headquarters, the TSA workforce is vigilant in ensuring the security of the passengers that travel through our Nation's vast transportation networks. TSA employs risk-based, intelligence-driven operations to prevent terrorist attacks and to reduce the vulnerability

of the Nation's transportation system to terrorism. We continue to evolve our security approach by examining the procedures and technologies we use, how specific security procedures are carried out, and how screening is conducted.

Our workforce is trained to carry out their responsibilities with professionalism and respect. TSA takes passengers' experiences seriously and has established multiple opportunities for travelers to provide feedback both during and after screening. Of the 600 million passengers screened on an annual basis, the TSA Contact Center receives approximately 750,000 contacts from the traveling public, of which less than eight percent constitute complaints. Travelers with disabilities and medical conditions also have the option of reaching out to TSA for assistance before getting to the airport. These travelers may call the TSA Cares toll free helpline number (1-855-787-2227) with questions about screening policies and procedures and what to expect at the security checkpoint. When a passenger with a disability or medical condition calls TSA Cares, a representative will provide assistance either with information about screening that is relevant to the passenger's specific disability or medical condition or the passenger may be referred to disability experts at TSA. This additional level of personal communication helps ensure that even those who do not travel often are aware of our screening policies before they arrive at the airport. Overall, most travelers have a positive experience at the airport.

Evolution of the TSA Workforce

It is important to appreciate how our workforce has evolved since the creation of TSA. Following the events of 9/11, when Congress created TSA to lead the national effort to guard against terrorist attacks on our transportation systems, we have built a workforce to meet the operational needs of the aviation system and have transformed our frontline workforce to address evolving threats while mitigating risks. Prior to 2006 we had 45,000 full-time equivalent TSOs conducting security operations focused on screening people and carry-on bags at the checkpoint and checked baggage. Today, as discussed more fully below, the same functions are carried out by approximately 25 percent fewer personnel, while the passenger volume remains about the same as it was in 2006. These efficiencies have enabled us to invest in personnel performing more specialized screening functions, thereby enhancing our layered security system.

With the support of Congress, TSA is moving away from a one-size-fits-all security model and towards its goal of providing the most effective transportation security in the most efficient way possible. While a one-size-fits-all approach has been effective over the past decade, and was necessary after 9/11, two key enablers – technology and intelligence – are allowing TSA to move toward a risk-based security model.

We created efficiencies in our operations and deployed technologies such as inline baggage screening equipment that have allowed us to better utilize our workforce to perform other functions. Using intelligence as our guide, we have also strengthened security by adding security functions including travel and identification document verification, behavior detection officers, explosives experts, operations coordination center officers, and officers conducting security operations beyond the checkpoint – without increasing our FTE numbers.

Ten years after the introduction of Federal screening at our Nation’s domestic airports, the TSA workforce is one of the most diverse in the Federal government. Our diversity spans every demographic—race, religion, ethnicity, gender—and cultural background. TSA draws its employees from the law enforcement community, private industry, and the military. In fact, our workforce exceeds the Civilian Labor Force (CLF) participation rates for the three largest minority groups (Hispanic, African American, and Asian American) and approximately 23 percent of our workforce are veterans of the United States Armed Forces. This diversity brings with it a diversity of experience and perspective. It is also a workforce of considerable on-the-job experience, with the average TSO working at TSA nearly six years and more than half of our workforce with more than five years.

Training for the Future

All aspects of our workforce regimen – hiring, promotion, retention, training, proactive compliance inspections, investigations and adjudications – are driven by adherence to the highest standards. TSA Administrator Pistole has made clear that integrity, professionalism, and hard work are bedrock principles and TSA is committed, not only to improving the effectiveness of security, but to doing so in the most cost-effective manner possible.

We are currently engaged in a headquarters transformation of TSA that is designed to increase efficiencies and more prudently allocate resources. An important part of this effort is the creation of the Office of Training and Workforce Engagement (OTWE), which centralizes technical and leadership training as well as workforce engagement programs that were previously dispersed throughout TSA. Maintaining and enhancing the capabilities of our employees, and particularly our TSOs, is a priority. Both the nature of our work and advances in technology has required our workforce to adapt and develop new, specialized skills as threats continue to evolve.

TSA will soon be providing Behavior Awareness Training (BAT) to the general TSO workforce. This training encourages all TSOs to use critical thinking skills and operational experience to better identify signs of anomalous behavior. Each officer has developed, through on-the-job experience, an understanding of what is routine for the operations at their assigned airports. BAT will build on this experience and teach TSOs how to identify and react to a number of behavior indicators that they may observe and consider anomalous in their operating environment.

Professional Development Programs

In addition to technical training, ongoing programs support the professional development of TSOs to continually improve their overall effectiveness and efficiency. For example, since last summer TSA has been delivering a tactical communications course for all managers, supervisors, and TSOs. The course, which expands upon the concepts and principles introduced during earlier engagement training, teaches officers how to effectively interact with passengers and co-workers. The course is designed to prepare TSOs for all types of human interactions by giving them tools and techniques to de-escalate difficult situations. At the checkpoint, these skills enable TSOs to more effectively complete the screening process.

We are also expanding supervisory training as we implement the Department of Homeland Security Cornerstone program, a unified approach to the development of essential skills for new and seasoned TSA supervisors. This program includes instructor-led classroom training, mentoring, and ongoing development opportunities.

Over the next 18 months all of our Supervisory Transportation Security Officers (STSOs) will complete a course on the essentials of supervising screening operations. This training will build upon the basic leadership and technical skills of front line supervisors, including effective communications, coaching, mentoring, and problem solving, and will enhance technical skills needed for effectively implementing security procedures. One of the key course objectives is to encourage STSOs to take ownership of their role in facilitating and contributing to the development of a responsible and professional workforce by establishing a high standard of performance, accountability, and integrity that their team members will strive to emulate.

Workforce development is further enhanced by the TSA Associates Program, which continues to provide TSA's frontline workforce the opportunity to receive a TSA Certificate of Achievement in Homeland Security upon the completion of three core courses offered at community colleges across the country. More than 2,500 officers have enrolled since the program's inception. Today, the program is represented by employees in all 50 States with more than 70 airports and 60 community colleges participating in the program.

It is not enough to train and engage our workforce – we must hold everyone accountable in the success of our mission. Administrator Pistole, shortly after coming to TSA, established the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) to ensure that allegations of misconduct are thoroughly investigated and that discipline is appropriate and fair across the agency. OPR ensures that our workforce is treated fairly by removing people that do not meet the high standards of integrity that our mission requires.

Conclusion

Today, as it has been since TSA's creation, the success of our mission depends upon our people. We are proud of the dedication and skill they bring to their work every day. In job satisfaction surveys, TSA employees consistently report a high level of commitment to the mission—that is why they are here. We appreciate your continued support as we strive to ensure that our workforce is well-prepared and given the proper tools to meet the challenges of securing our aviation transportation system. Thank you, Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Jackson Lee,

and members of the Subcommittee, for the opportunity to appear before you today. I look forward to answering your questions.