

**Statement for the Record**

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**Before**

**The U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security**

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***“Ebola in the Homeland: The Importance of Effective International, Federal, State and Local  
Coordination”***

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Chairman McCaul, Ranking Member Thompson, distinguished members of the Committee, and the Texas Delegation, we appreciate the opportunity to submit this statement on the U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) and the Office of Health Affairs’ (OHA) roles in the Federal government’s Ebola response.

The 2014 Ebola epidemic is the largest in history with devastating impacts in multiple West African countries – the hardest hit being Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. In the midst of this public health event, it is important to remember that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has stated that the risk of a widespread Ebola outbreak in the United States is very low. OHA and CBP, as part of the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) overall strategy, are engaged on a daily basis with DHS interagency partners to prepare for and respond to Ebola and other potential threats to public health.

As you know, DHS is responsible for securing our nation’s borders and assisting the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in safeguarding the American public from communicable diseases that threaten to traverse our borders. In doing so, DHS is committed to ensuring that our responses to the Ebola epidemic are conducted consistent with established civil rights and civil liberties protections. OHA is at the intersection of homeland security and public health, better

known as health security. OHA provides medical and health expertise to DHS components and senior leadership, and is helping to coordinate with Components and provide them with medical advice regarding the Department's efforts in preparing for and responding to Ebola. In today's remarks, we will provide an overview of the Department's efforts to protect the American people from Ebola, and CBP's specific efforts within ports of entry to identify and respond to travelers who may pose a threat to public health.

As the Nation's unified border security agency, CBP is responsible for securing our Nation's borders while facilitating the flow of legitimate international travel and trade that is so vital to our Nation's economy. Within this broad responsibility, CBP's priority mission remains to prevent terrorists and terrorist weapons from entering the United States. CBP also plays an important role in limiting the introduction, transmission, and spread of serious communicable diseases from foreign countries.

The President has been focused every day on this response and has stated to his senior health, homeland security, and national security advisors that the epidemic in West Africa is a top national security priority, and that we will continue to do everything necessary to address it. Because of the steps we have taken, the President reiterated that he is confident that the chances of an outbreak in the United States are extraordinarily low.

#### *Screening and Observation Protocols*

CBP and the CDC have closely coordinated to develop policies, procedures, and protocols to identify travelers to the United States who may have a communicable disease, responding in a manner that minimizes risk to the public. These pre-existing procedures – applied in the land, sea, and air environments – have been utilized collaboratively by both agencies on a number of occasions with positive results.

As a standard part of every inspection, CBP officers observe all passengers as they arrive in the United States for overt signs of illness, and question travelers, as appropriate, at all U.S. ports of entry. CBP officers are trained in illness recognition by the CDC. Officers look for overt signs of illness and can obtain additional information from the travelers during the inspection interview. If a traveler is identified with overt signs of a communicable disease of public health significance, the traveler is isolated from the traveling public and referred to CDC's Regional Quarantine Officers or local public health for medical evaluation.

It is important to note that the CDC has worked closely with affected countries, and CBP has provided support and assistance, to ensure that all outbound travelers from the areas affected by the West Africa Ebola outbreak are screened for Ebola symptoms before departure. CDC provides "Do Not Board" recommendations to CBP and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) regarding individuals who may be infected with a highly contagious disease, present a threat to public health, and should be prevented from traveling via commercial aircraft. TSA is performing vetting of all airline passengers coming to, departing from or flying within the U.S. to identify matches to the "Do Not Board" list and flag matched individuals' records in the Secure Flight system to prevent the issuance of a boarding pass. TSA is also

supporting CDC requirements to identify all passenger reservations on flights where it has been determined that one or more passengers present an Ebola risk, such as when passengers have traveled from the affected African areas and have exhibited Ebola symptoms.

### *Additional Ebola Screening Measures*

Although we have recently seen the first cases of Ebola virus in the United States, the CDC believes that the U.S. clinical and public health systems will work effectively to prevent the spread of the Ebola virus. DHS has executed a number of measures to minimize the risk of those sick with Ebola entering the United States, and we take a layered approach to ensure there are varying points at which an ill individual could be identified. To this end, DHS is also focused on protecting the air traveling public and taking steps to ensure that travelers with communicable diseases like Ebola are identified, isolated, and quickly and safely referred to medical personnel.

On October 21, DHS announced travel restrictions in the form of additional screening and protective measures at our ports of entry for travelers from the three Ebola-affected countries in West Africa. As of October 22, all passengers arriving in the United States whose travel originated in Liberia, Sierra Leone, or Guinea are required to fly into one of five airports including New York John F. Kennedy; Washington Dulles; Newark; Chicago O'Hare; and Atlanta International Airport. DHS is working closely with the airlines to implement these restrictions with minimal travel disruption.

At these five airports, all travelers from the affected countries undergo enhanced screening measures consisting of targeted questions and a temperature check, through the use of non-contact thermal thermometers, seeking to determine whether the passengers are experiencing symptoms or may have been exposed to Ebola. Detailed contact information is also collected in the event the CDC needs to contact them in the future. If there is reason to believe a passenger has been exposed to Ebola, either through the questionnaire, temperature check, or overt symptoms, CBP refers the passenger to CDC for further evaluation. The CDC has surged staff to these airports to support this mission requirement.

In addition to these measures, CBP officers are asking all passengers traveling on a passport from Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea, regardless of where they traveled from, whether they have been in one of the three countries in the prior 21 days. If the traveler has been in one of the three countries in the prior 21 days, he or she will be referred for additional screening and, if necessary, CDC or other medical personnel in the area will be contacted pursuant to existing protocols.

The U.S. Coast Guard is also monitoring vessels known to be inbound from Ebola-affected countries, and is providing information to the Captain of the Port, District, and CDC representatives.

The CDC maintains Federal jurisdiction to determine whether to isolate or quarantine potentially infected arrivals. DHS personnel may be called upon to support the enforcement of the CDC's determinations, and we stand ready to help.

### *Information Sharing and Training*

DHS has prioritized sharing information and raising awareness as important elements in combating the spread of Ebola, and CBP has a unique opportunity to deliver critical information to targeted travelers from the affected countries in ports of entry. Secretary Johnson recently directed CBP to distribute health advisories to all travelers arriving in the U.S. from the Ebola-affected countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea. These advisories provide the traveler with information on Ebola, health signs to look for, and information for their doctor should they need to seek medical attention in the future.

CBP and TSA have posted messages from the CDC at select airport locations that provide awareness on how to prevent the spread of infectious disease, typical symptoms of Ebola, and instructions to call a doctor if the traveler becomes ill in the future.

We also share information with our nongovernmental and state and local partners. TSA is engaging with industry partners and domestic and foreign air carriers to provide awareness on the current outbreak, and has issued an Information Circular to air carriers reinforcing the CDC's message on Ebola and providing guidance on identifying potential travelers with Ebola.

OHA, through the National Biosurveillance Integration Center, is continuing to monitor the outbreak to coordinate information in response to the event. These reports on biological events are disseminated to more than 15,000 Federal, State, and local users, many of whom work in the public health sector or support 78 fusion centers across the Nation, helping to ensure that the most up-to-date information is available.

DHS is committed to ensuring that our own employees have up-to-date and accurate information. We have provided our own personnel with background information on the current outbreak, information on the regions of importance; symptoms of the virus and mode of transmission; and operational procedures and precautions for processing travelers showing signs of illness. CBP field personnel will be kept up to date on national, regional and location-specific information on Ebola preparedness and response measures through regular field musters. CBP has provided guidance to the field on baggage inspection for international travelers from impacted countries, proper procedures for inspection and handling of prohibited meat products, and proper safeguarding and disposal of garbage from all inbound international flights.

CBP officers receive the CDC's public health training, which teaches officers to identify symptoms and characteristics of ill travelers. CBP also provides operational training and guidance to frontline personnel on how to respond to travelers with potential illness, including referring individuals who display signs of illness to CDC quarantine officers for secondary screening, the use of personal protective equipment (which is available for employees at these airports along with instructions for use), as well as training on assisting CDC with implementation of its isolation and quarantine protocols. CBP officers are trained to employ universal precautions, an infection control approach developed by the CDC, when they encounter individuals with overt symptoms of illness or contaminated items in examinations of baggage

and cargo. Universal precautions assume that every direct contact with body fluids is infectious and requires exposed employees to respond accordingly. TSA also ensures that its employees are adequately trained and, where appropriate, are provided personal protective equipment. The health and safety of DHS employees is also our priority as we carry out this critical mission.

### *Conclusion*

The Department of Homeland Security has worked closely with its interagency partners to develop a layered approach to identifying ill travelers and protecting the air traveling public. DHS is always assessing the measures we have in place and continues to look at any additional actions that can be taken to ensure the safety of the American people. We look forward to working with you to address this problem collaboratively. We will continue to closely monitor the Ebola outbreak, and will evaluate additional measures as needed.

We thank you for your time and interest in this important issue. We look forward to answering your questions.