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“TSA Modernization: Industry Perspectives on Key Security and Travel Reforms
25 Years After 9/11”

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Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on TSA modernization and the future of aviation security.

My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I serve as Chief Executive Officer of the Dallas Fort Worth International Airport. Prior to joining DFW, I served as the Chief Operations Officer at the Denver International Airport. Earlier in my career, I spent six years at the Transportation Security Administration, including serving as Assistant Administrator for the Office of Security Operations, where I oversaw security operations and regulatory compliance nationwide. I also played a leading role in TSA’s modernization efforts at the time, notably the rollout of TSA PreCheck.

I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today because I have seen aviation security from both sides — as a federal security provider and regulator and now as the leader of the world’s fourth-busiest international airport. The United States has the largest, most complex, and yet safest aviation system in the world. TSA officers, federal air marshals, inspectors, canine teams, and airport security personnel perform an incredibly demanding mission every single day under challenging operational conditions and have kept our skies safe for 24 years and counting.

As we discuss modernization today, I think it is important that we begin with that reality. The system has worked for a quarter of a century. That said, we can never rest on our laurels and so we must recognize that our aviation system is entering a period of tremendous growth and even more complexity. Passenger volumes

continue to rise. Threats continue to evolve. Major international events like the FIFA World Cup will place extraordinary demands on our aviation infrastructure and security systems.

The theme of Modernization is not new. It has been a topic of conversation for a long time. In fact, the image on TSA's newly created Gold Plus website, for example, is almost identical to "the tunnel of technology" introduced by the International Air Transport Association (IATA) on November 30, 2010 — more than 15 years ago. The industry's current trajectory balanced against the increased demand that I just described requires a heightened sense of urgency and a demonstrated bias toward action.

While not necessarily common in government, TSA does have a model for this approach. It's called TSA PreCheck. In the spring of 2011, after six months of harsh criticism for a change in pat-down procedures, the TSA set out to launch a new approach to security, calling it Risk Based Security at the time. The Agency started working on this project in earnest in May and on Oct. 4 launched its first four airports in one day. It grew to 12 in a month, then to over 40 airports in just a few months.

How was such a dramatic shift possible in such a short time? I would suggest that three factors were largely responsible. First, there was a sense of urgency based on the combination of public ridicule and simultaneously a growing threat that couldn't be ignored. Second, after more than a year without a Senate confirmed Administrator, the newly confirmed Administrator had a mandate to implement change. And third, Congress supported the changes. In fact, the first time that I ever testified before this Committee was to discuss the promise of TSA PreCheck.

Like PreCheck, the future aviation security environment must be risk-based, technology-enabled, operationally flexible, and centered on both security effectiveness and passenger flow.

TSA modernization must begin with the workforce. A modernized TSA must have a secure, confident, and mission-focused workforce, not one wondering whether they are going to receive a paycheck during a government shutdown. Aviation security is a national security mission, workforce stability and continuity matter. We cannot continue asking frontline personnel to absorb repeated uncertainty while simultaneously expecting operational excellence under pressure.

In this light, I want to take a moment to thank TSA Acting Administrator Ha Nguyen McNeill for her leadership, partnership, and unwavering commitment to

TSA's mission, especially during the recent government shutdowns. I also want to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of the TSA Officers and their leaders in the field, who continued to carry out their mission with focus and dedication, even when being asked to choose between gas for their cars and food for their families. In particular, I am extraordinary proud of the men and women who carry out TSA's mission at DFW. Throughout the shutdowns, they continued to show up ensuring passengers continued to move safely, efficiently, and with minimal disruption.

While I am grateful for the personal sacrifices of so many, Congress must ensure that these officers are never placed in this precarious situation again. Congress rightfully recognized after the first shutdown that Air Traffic was too critical for our safety to allow Controllers to go unpaid. The consequences of distraction and short staffing were too grave. How could the same Congress ignore this same reality for TSA? Our skies will not be safe if we don't keep our checkpoints secure. Almost 25 years ago, Congress created the TSA with the sentiment that "we will never forget." To me, it sure felt like we had forgotten for a while and I am grateful that the House ultimately passed appropriations to fund most of the Department of Homeland Security to get these faithful men and women paid and refocused.

Modernization must also focus on improving security effectiveness through smarter deployment of technology and operational flexibility.

At DFW, we are investing heavily in the future of aviation security as part of our approximately \$12 billion capital improvement program. Back in 2019, DFW operated approximately 44 screening lanes across 14 checkpoints. Once our current modernization efforts are complete, we expect to operate more than 80 total screening lanes, 47 of which will be NextGen lanes across 17 checkpoints, designed around advanced screening technology, improved throughput, and enhanced passenger experience.

Given the timing and priority that we place on security, we have chosen to utilize TSA's Capability Acceptance Process (CAP) and fund these security improvements ourselves. That said, for TSA to be able to effectively roll out similar technology across the system in a timely manner, it's critical to gain immediate and consistent access to capital. This capital funding should be predictable in terms of timing and flexible enough to allow TSA to pivot as technology matures or new threats emerge.

Our new checkpoints and lanes will expand our use of TSA PreCheck Touchless ID. This rollout has been incredibly well received by our passengers so far and we believe that it is absolutely the best approach to identity verification going forward. In our new installations, we envision marrying this technology to eGates for even greater efficiency and passenger experience. DFW also sees significant promise in concepts such as “image on alarm only” screening protocols. I am excited by the promise shown in current CT scanner pilots. Moreover, I strongly urge the TSA to consider “image on alarm” on other technology in appropriate low-risk environments. Applying “image on alarm” on existing AT X-ray would allow TSA to better prioritize CT deployment and partially overcome the current CT scanner shortfall, with full deployment not expected until the 2040s.

We are also modernizing exit lane operations at DFW, an aspect of the screening operation that has been hotly contested for 24 years. Historically, DFW operated 19 exit lanes staffed through traditional approaches. Today, we are replacing and installing 51 exits with technology-enabled solutions that improve operational consistency and allow personnel to focus on higher-value security functions. Once unreliable, this technology has matured into a proven solution. There is no reason for airports, airlines, and TSA to keep debating what is really a solved problem.

The same modernization philosophy applies to international processing.

DFW was proud to partner with American Airlines, TSA, and CBP on the nation’s first One Stop Security (OSS) pilot involving international passenger transfers from London Heathrow through DFW. The pilot demonstrates that secure and efficient international processing can coexist when built on trusted international partnerships and security equivalency standards.

To ensure equivalency, we invested heavily in aviation worker screening. Airports process thousands of employees, vendors, contractors, and authorized personnel every day through secure access points. Those access points are part of the aviation system’s non-public access areas and the security posture there must remain commensurate with the evolving threat environment.

Let me be clear, I’m not advocating for a “one size fits all” solution for employee screening and I believe that airports should maintain the authority to make individual decisions. Those decisions though, should be influenced by return on investment (ROI). For example, only those airports that invest in the bilateral security standard, should benefit from the OSS program. For us, we believe that

the investment in OSS represents a significant ROI, and we're grateful to have been selected as a launch airport.

The results of the program speak for themselves.

We've been surveying our OSS passengers since the first flight in September 2025. Ninety-seven percent say the process saved them time. And 80% say One Stop would influence their decision to use DFW as the port of entry for future trips. Additionally, 97% stated that not having to rescreen through TSA was the biggest benefit.

DFW strongly supports a coordinated TSA, CBP, and whole-of-government approach to fully authorize both passenger One Stop Security and International Remote Baggage Screening (IRBS) programs. It's critical that these programs include both passenger *and* baggage screening components to fully realize the operational, security and passenger experience benefits associated with a more seamless international transfer. As international travel demand continues to grow, particularly ahead of major international events like the FIFA World Cup, modernized international transfer processing will become increasingly important to maintaining secure, efficient and globally competitive airport operations.

A modernized aviation security framework must recognize threats at both the front door and the back door.

Airports are increasingly confronting threats that extend beyond the checkpoint itself, including unauthorized drone activity and perimeter security vulnerabilities. At DFW, we continue working closely with our federal partners on emerging threat technologies including drone detection and mitigation systems and advanced perimeter monitoring such as WAV cameras. Unauthorized drone activity presents both a safety and an operational risk to the National Airspace System (NAS), particularly at large hub airports operating in complex airspace environments. Airports need clear operational authorities, scalable detection and mitigation technologies, and strong interagency coordination to address unauthorized drone activity before it disrupts critical aviation operations. DFW stands ready and is uniquely positioned to participate in a state, local, tribal and territorial counter unmanned aircraft systems (C-UAS) program, recognizing the need for strong federal oversight and training requirements.

Finally, modernization requires procurement reform and operational agility.

Technology evolves rapidly. Threats evolve rapidly. Procurement timelines often do not. Airports and passengers experience the consequences when proven technologies take years to deploy at scale. TSA and airports need greater flexibility to test, evaluate, and scale successful technologies more quickly.

That same operational flexibility should extend to programs like the Reimbursable Screening Services Program (RSSP), which supports innovative passenger processing outside traditional terminal screening areas. At DFW, we'll soon be launching Private Suites (PS) at our corporate aviation facilities to provide streamlined, enhanced screening for private passengers and crew. RSSP programs give TSA funding flexibility to meet needs it may otherwise be unable to support, improving customer service and operational flexibility while maintaining federal security oversight.

Members of the Committee, modernization is not about reducing security. It is about building a smarter, more resilient, more scalable aviation security system capable of meeting the demands of the future.

DFW stands ready to continue partnering with TSA, Congress, our airline partners, labor stakeholders, and federal agencies to help build that future.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I look forward to your questions.