



## Airlines for America®

We Connect the World

Testimony

### “TSA MODERNIZATION: INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES ON KEY SECURITY AND TRAVEL REFORMS 25 YEARS AFTER 9/11”

#### STATEMENT OF CHRISTOPHER T. SUNUNU PRESIDENT AND CEO, AIRLINES FOR AMERICA (A4A) BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

May 20, 2026

Good morning, Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson and members of the Committee. A4A and our members<sup>1</sup> appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts and recommendations on modernizing and strategically investing in the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the broader aviation security system to provide the safe, secure, stable and efficient travel experience that the traveling public deserves.

**Thank You.** While A4A has several TSA modernization recommendations, which are outlined below, I would be remiss not to begin by thanking TSA's workforce for their hard work and dedication during the government shutdowns that they have endured over the last year. On behalf of the airline community and the travelling public, I want to thank the TSA Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) for coming to work during those trying times. Their professionalism and service to the traveling public is something our industry is grateful for, and it is long overdue that we end the practice of using aviation workers and the traveling public as pawns in larger policy debates and funding disagreements. We should not politicize the livelihoods of ordinary Americans and public servants.

**Impact.** Much is at stake. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and its component agencies, including TSA are the regulators and service providers for our critical sector of the economy. Commercial aviation drives 5% of U.S. GDP and helps support more than 10 million U.S. jobs. We operate the safest mode of transportation with an average of 28,000 flights in 2025 carrying 2.7 million passengers and 61,000 tons of cargo every day across the globe. In particular, both the TSA and U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) play a vital role in protecting the nation's transportation system to ensure the daily movement of people and commerce.

**TSA Modernization.** TSA modernization is an important and timely topic, and A4A appreciates and supports the Committee's efforts to revisit legislative solutions that respond to the challenges of today's travel environment. Broad TSA authorization legislation has not been addressed by Congress since the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Reauthorization Act of 2018 (PL 115-254). Your review is also timely as it coincides with important policy expirations. These expirations include:

- In Fiscal Year (FY) 2027, the 14-year diversion of a portion of the September 11<sup>th</sup> Aviation Passenger Security Fee (Security Fee) to the Treasury Department for debt reduction expires on October 1, 2027; and
- In FY2028, the 24-year mandatory commitment of \$250 million of the security fee revenue to the Aviation Security Capital Fund (ASCF) expires.

**Recommendations.** A4A strongly supports both the expiration of security fee diversion and an update and extension of the ASCF to account for the tremendous investments needed for technology development and

---

<sup>1</sup> A4A is the trade association for the leading U.S. airlines, both passenger and cargo carriers. Members of the association are Alaska Airlines; American Airlines; Atlas Air; Delta Air Lines; FedEx; JetBlue Airways; Southwest Airlines; United Airlines; and UPS. Air Canada is an associate member.



## Airlines for America®

We Connect the World

Testimony

deployment across the United States. Both are discussed in further detail below, as well as brief summaries of our comprehensive list of legislative priorities and policy recommendations.

- *Permanently Address Government Shutdowns.* Government shutdowns are disastrous, and they hurt the economy, U.S. travelers and TSA. The most recent shutdowns occurred along the backdrop of U.S. airlines experiencing record breaking travel volumes. In 2025, nine of the busiest screening days in TSA history occurred, including a record-setting 3.1 million passengers and crewmembers screened on November 30, 2025. Throughout 2025, TSA screened over 906 million passengers, 480 million checked bags and 2.1 billion carry-on bags.

From October to November 2025, the 43-day shutdown and FAA-mandated schedule reductions resulted in more than 9,000 flight cancellations and disrupted six million passengers. According to a [report](#) released by the Center for Transportation Policy, the U.S. economy took an estimated \$7.25 billion hit—more than \$150 million per day. TSA lost over 1,100 TSOs, and any work on technology deployment and innovation projects were stalled.

To add insult to injury, this year's 76-day shutdown of DHS caused some of the highest callout rates seen in the history of TSA, leading to major operational disruptions at U.S. airports, where lines exceeded three and four hours. Adding to the long-term operational strain, it is estimated that over 1,500 additional TSOs have quit federal service since the prior shutdown. We are concerned the risk of future shutdowns and uncertainty of pay will have lasting effects on TSA's ability to fulfill its security mission as it struggles to recruit, hire and train its future workforce.

While several legislative bills have been proposed, the bottom line is that **the federal government needs a long-term solution to ensure aviation workers are paid during shutdowns.** A durable solution should provide standard rates of pay, allowances, pay differentials, benefits and other payments otherwise payable on a regular basis to employees of the TSA engaged in screening operations, aviation security duties or related mission support functions necessary to carry out security screening under chapter 449 of title 49, United States Code.

**It is imperative that TSA's frontline and essential workforce should not be impacted by lapses in appropriation and resulting shutdowns that diminish both the short and long-term capabilities of the agency.** We stand ready to work with the Committee on solutions including:

- **End TSA Security Fee Diversion.** A4A encourages the Committee to support efforts to end the diversion of TSA security fee revenue. In FY2027 alone, \$1.68 billion of TSA Security fees will be diverted from aviation security to pay down debt. We are grateful for the Administration's FY2027 budget proposal to eliminate the annual diversion of funds collected for aviation security from the passenger security fee in FY2027. Additionally, the FAA Reauthorization Act of 2018 statutorily ended the diversion of TSA security fees starting on October 1, 2027. *A4A asks the Committee to support and maintain this permanent elimination of TSA security fee diversion and oppose any efforts to extend diversion of the fee in additional fiscal years or legislative efforts to negate the statutory elimination.*
- **Invest in Checkpoint Property Screening System (CPSS).** TSA has indicated that, at current funding levels, it will until FY2049 to get computed tomography (CT) machines deployed system-wide and until FY2042 for credential authentication technology (CAT) deployment system-wide. The deployment schedule is strictly based on funding levels and not the ability to deploy technology. TSA has cited that if adequate funding were available, deployment of these critical technologies could be completed by



## Airlines for America®

We Connect the World

Testimony

FY2029. This timeline has slid further behind due to shutdown impacts. *A4A supports funding levels that would expedite and accelerate CPSS technology deployment.*

- **Reauthorize and Modernize the Aviation Security Capital Fund.** Since 2004, checked baggage Explosive Detection Screening (EDS) recapitalization has been funded by the Aviation Security Capital Fund (ASCF). The ASCF currently provides \$250 million each fiscal year, and its mandatory appropriation is scheduled to expire at the end of FY2027. Equally important are needed investments in cargo screening algorithms, detection standards and at-scale screening methods to include the use of canine. *A4A is advocating that the ACSF should be extended and expanded.*

We are thankful for Subcommittee Chair Strong, Committee Chair Garbarino and Representatives Kennedy, Guest, Mackenzie and Evans for their bipartisan leadership on introducing the “Spending Aviation Fees for Equipment, Guaranteeing Upgraded and Advanced Risk Detection and Safety Act,” or SAFEGUARDS Act. Passengers have long paid the 9/11 Passenger Security Fee with the understanding that those dollars would go directly toward aviation security. By reinvesting these funds in next-generation screening technologies and modernized checked baggage systems, this legislation will enhance security, reduce checkpoint congestion and improve the overall travel experience for millions of Americans. *A4A strongly supports the SAFEGUARDS Act.*

- **TSA Security Policy for Air Transportation Improvement Transparency.** A4A recommends the Committee consider legislation that would improve and make more transparent TSA's regulation, security program, security directive, emergency amendment and policy clarification determination processes, including required use risk assessments, limitations on use of emergency actions and consultation with stakeholders.
- **Sustain Investment in Research and Development (R&D) of Advanced Cargo Screening Capabilities.** As global trade volumes grow and cargo shipments become increasingly complex, the threat environment has evolved. Cargo transported via air presents potential vectors for terrorist exploitation, specifically regarding improvised incendiary devices (IID). While the TSA and its partners have made significant strides on improving screening processes, current methods and technologies still face limitations in speed, accuracy, adaptability and scalability. *To maintain the safety and resilience of our transportation networks, it is essential that TSA continue to prioritize and expand R&D funding in cargo screening capabilities for canine and technologies. This investment would strengthen national security, economic stability and confidence in the global supply chain.*
- **Air Passenger Privacy (Biometrics).** The use of biometrics in the air travel environment improves both security and the passenger experience. A4A supports the use of biometrics and is concerned with some previous proposals that would severely limit or in some cases end the use of biometrics at airports. It is important that any proposal does not stymie innovation or negatively impact TSA PreCheck, Touchless ID or Trusted Traveler programs. Any proposal should continue to afford travelers the choice to opt-out, require TSA to use clear messaging and signage and ensure data collection is managed in a way that protects privacy.
- **Known Shipper Program.** The Known Shipper Program must be modernized and enhanced to accommodate different air cargo business models between freight, express all-cargo and passenger carriers. *The current Known Shipper Program framework is outdated and does not reflect the complexity of today's air cargo program.*



## Airlines for America®

We Connect the World

Testimony

- **Make TSA's Reimbursable Screening Services Program (RSSP) Permanent.** A4A supports making the RSSP program permanent. The program is currently operated as a pilot that is set to expire in September 2026. The program allows governments (i.e., airports) and private entities (i.e., airlines) to enter into agreements with TSA for TSA to provide special security screening outside of the primary passenger checkpoints.
- **Make TSA's One Stop Security (OSS) Program Permanent.** Under Section 7132 of the James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Congress established the OSS pilot program for six international locations. That pilot program is set to expire in 2028. OSS enables passengers and their checked baggage to avoid redundant screening in the United States if they are screened to comparable standards at the international Last Point of Departure (LDP) airport. *A4A supports making the program permanent and expanding it to more LPD and U.S. airport locations.*
- **Overuse of Cybersecurity Emergency Amendments.** A4A recommends the Committee update TSA's use of emergency authority for emergency amendments to limit the specific corrective actions necessary to address the emergency and limit effective dates to no more than six months, without either a rulemaking or a review by DHS's Transportation Security Oversight Board (TSOB) every six months or until the emergency amendment is rescinded. Today, emergency cyber authorities dating back as far as 2023 are still in place, far removed from the emergency that necessitated the action. *We encourage the Committee to modernize the use of TSA's emergency authority and reduce the administrative burden put on operators covered by those actions.*
- **Cybersecurity Harmonization.** Today, airline operators must consider 13 different federal agency and department cybersecurity regulatory requirements when reporting incidents or complying with measures and inspections. *A4A supports legislation that would harmonize cybersecurity obligations across DHS and throughout the federal government.*
- **Modernize TSA's Security Service Fee Dispute Resolution Process.** TSA oversees the proper collection of security service fees and refunding fees where an airline has overpaid. However, TSA's review and refund processes lack adequate structure when fees are disputed, forcing airlines to wait years while the TSA considers disputes, with no guaranteed path for judicial review. *A4A supports legislation that would create a formalized administrative process to ensure swift and fair processing of disputed payments.*
- **Human Trafficking Reporting Protections.** A4A supports legislation that would eliminate a disincentive for flight crews to report potential human trafficking situations. *A4A proposes that Congress explicitly provide immunity to persons, including flight crews, for reporting suspected human trafficking.*
- **Cybersecurity Information Sharing Act of 2015 (CISA'15).** While not a TSA specific issue, CISA'15 enables private entities to increase their protection of data, devices and computer systems, while promoting the voluntary sharing of cyber threat information with industry and government partners within a secure policy and legal framework. Numerous Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) information sharing agreements are based on CISA'15's information protection provisions. CISA'15 is set to expire at the end of FY2026. *A4A supports extension of the program and is grateful for Chairman Garbarino's leadership on H.R. 5079, the Widespread Information Management for the Welfare of Infrastructure and Government (WIMWIG) Act.*
- **Screening Partnership Program.** Although there are not any current legislative proposals to reform TSA's Screening Partnership Program (SPP), we support increasing transparency in the process and



## Airlines for America®

We Connect the World

Testimony

engagement with industry, to include airlines and prospective SPP airports. SPP has existed since the agency was founded through the Aviation and Transportation Security Act; however, SPP was historically siloed from TSA's other innovation authorities. Allowing airports and airlines to provide substantive input into the selection of the qualified third-party provider and the services the contractors provide would be an improvement to the current SPP model. Key industry stakeholders should be encouraged to explore and support innovative value propositions that leverage TSA approved cutting-edge technologies at SPP airports for screening passengers and bags; create operational efficiencies and reduce wait times; and enhance the overall traveler experience. We are committed to TSA's modernization efforts and support innovative solutions that accelerate the deployment of checkpoint and checked baggage technology as well as algorithms that increase efficiency. *Ensuring SPP remains an option for airports and does not become a mandatory program is paramount to the U.S. aviation industry.*

**Conclusion.** Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. As we approach FIFA World Cup, America 250 and the busy summer travel season—which is expected to see 263 million passengers on U.S. airlines alone—I strongly urge the Committee to support innovative security and facilitation solutions that make travel secure and efficient while ensuring the United States remains competitive on the world stage. We look forward to working with the Committee to modernize our aviation security system and appreciate the Committee's focus on these important issues and proposals.