



TESTIMONY OF

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Good morning Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), which is part of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), values the longstanding and constructive relationship it has with you and this Subcommittee. I appreciate having this opportunity to provide an update on our response to, and the effects of, the COVID-19 pandemic; emphasize Fiscal Year (FY) 2021 accomplishments, including workforce initiatives and new technology deployments; as well as preview the President's FY22 Discretionary Request.

In just over four months, the nation will mark 20 years since the September 11th terrorist attacks. In the wake of that tragedy, TSA was established through enactment of the Aviation and Transportation Security Act (ATSA) and charged with protecting the nation's transportation systems and ensuring freedom of movement for people and commerce. Our continuing vision to achieving this mission is to be an agile security agency that engages its partners and the American people to outmatch a dynamic threat. While the COVID-19 pandemic has tested our agility, the resiliency of our workforce, and the strength of our partnerships, we have adapted and maintained our security mission while prioritizing the health and safety of both our valued employees and the traveling public.

COVID-19 Response and Effects

Before the emergence of the COVID-19 virus, on an annual basis U.S. transportation systems accommodated approximately 965 million domestic and international aviation passengers, over 600 million passengers traveling on over-the-road buses, and more than 10.1 billion passenger trips on mass transit. By April 2020, the nation and the world came to a near standstill due to the COVID-19 pandemic with airport passenger screening volumes down as much as 97 percent. TSA met these challenges by implementing proactive and protective measures, and adapting our operations to protect the TSA workforce, traveling public, and other transportation workers from this global threat.

TSA diligently followed guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and DHS as we provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to our workforce, developed and implemented new protocols to support social distancing, and implemented other required standards and procedures. Our "Stay Healthy. Stay Secure." campaign detailed the measures we implemented at security checkpoints across the nation to make the screening process safer for passengers and our workforce by reducing the potential of exposure to COVID-19. Through our "Stay Healthy. Stay Secure." efforts, and with the support Congress provided through the CARES Act, some of the critical steps we took over the past year include:

- Deployed signage at the checkpoint to remind travelers to practice social distancing;
- Verified identification (ID) without physical contact between TSA officers and the travelers;
- Installed plastic shielding at various locations throughout the TSA checkpoint;

- Increased cleaning and sanitization of frequently touched checkpoint surfaces and screening equipment, including bins;
- Mandated all TSA officers wear masks and gloves at the checkpoint and additionally wear eye protection or clear plastic face shields;
- Required glove changes after each pat-down and at the request of any passenger, as well as changes of Explosives Trace Detection swabs after each use;
- Allowed one liquid hand sanitizer container, up to 12 ounces, in carry-on bags; and
- Shared COVID-19 specific travel tips and the actions TSA has taken in response to the pandemic with the traveling public via a designated website (<https://www.tsa.gov/coronavirus>), and multiple TSA social media accounts and blogs.

In addition to these safety measures, personnel across the agency took direct action to support the safe return of U.S. citizens to the United States and foreign nationals back to their home countries, as well as facilitated the movement and distribution of critical PPE around the world. For example, our international TSA Representatives partnered with the Department of State to repatriate over a hundred thousand American citizens stranded in countries and territories across the globe, our policy office issued emergency authorizations for air cargo operations to move critical health supplies, our surface operations personnel pivoted to virtual forums to conduct exercises and assessments with partners and stakeholders, and our contracting and procurement program worked with small businesses to quickly secure PPE, including four million face masks and acrylic barriers deployed at airports. Our TSA officers; inspectors; canine teams; federal air marshals; and mission support, administrative, and headquarters personnel adjusted their training, operations, and coordination to achieve TSA's mission. We thank them for their continued dedication to the mission.

TSA also worked closely with industry stakeholders and interagency and international partners during the pandemic. In December 2020, TSA collaborated with our interagency partners to help develop and disseminate the Runway to Recovery. This joint DHS, Department of Transportation, and Department of Health and Human Services guidance to airports and industry was designed to align efforts and mitigate health risks of COVID-19 to the workforce and traveling public.

In February 2021, in close coordination with our stakeholders, TSA implemented provisions of President Biden's Executive Order on Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel, and enforced the related CDC Order by requiring travelers to wear face masks when they are in airports, bus and rail stations, as well as while on passenger aircraft, public transportation, passenger railroads, and over-the-road buses operating on scheduled fixed-routes. In developing our guidance, TSA collaborated with stakeholders to identify specific exemptions to the face mask requirement and supplement efforts already implemented by aircraft and airport operators, foreign air carriers, and surface transportation owners.

While striving to meet the security needs of the nation and respond to the global

pandemic, the health, safety, and support of the TSA workforce remained the top priority for the agency. TSA supported its workforce by instituting readily available Weather and Safety Leave for employees at higher risk of severe illness from exposure to COVID-19, implementing contact tracing protocols, issuing guidance on returning to the workplace in a safe and responsible manner, and maximizing telework for employees whose work could be performed remotely. Additionally, TSA employees received accelerated access to the COVID-19 vaccine through the DHS Operation Vaccinate Our Workforce program. As of mid-April 2021, 51 percent of eligible TSA employees opted into this program; of those who have opted-in, 54 percent have received at least one dose of the vaccine and 32 percent have been fully vaccinated. Many others have received the vaccine through other federal, state, and local vaccine initiatives.

COVID-19 has tested the resiliency of our workforce. Sadly, we lost 16 employees and one screening contractor from the effects of the virus. Despite such losses, the TSA workforce, to its credit, has demonstrated an incredible commitment to the TSA mission. I want to thank the Subcommittee for your enduring support of the TSA workforce in these trying times, and for your heartfelt letters of condolence for those who passed away.

FY21 Highlights

I would like to thank you for the FY21 appropriation, which is \$144.2 million above the amount enacted for FY20 and will advance TSA's mission by continuing to address key priorities and further support our workforce. Prior to the pandemic, TSA worked to accelerate technology updates and deployments such as Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) and Computed Tomography (CT). CAT and CT units represent significant technologic advancements from the equipment currently used for identity verification and the screening of accessible property. With passenger volumes down as a result of decreased travel during the pandemic, TSA used the opportunity to deploy these technologies faster than under normal circumstances. The support you provided in FY21 for the procurement and deployment of CT machines and CAT systems will enhance our detection capabilities at the checkpoint and reduce touch points during the screening process.

CT technology provides superior detection capability, is more convenient for passengers, and may eliminate the requirement to take electronics, liquids, aerosols, and gels out of carry-on bags. This improved technology, which has been demonstrated to some of you at your local airports, reduces alarms requiring resolution as well as a touch-point between a TSA officer and a passenger's property. As of mid-April 2021, we have deployed 300 CT systems at 142 airports. In FY21, TSA intends to test, procure, and complete deployment planning for approximately 242 additional mid-size CT systems using available funding.

As of mid-April 2021, we have also deployed 1,053 CAT units at 121 locations. CAT units automatically verify the validity of identification documents presented by passengers during the security screening process and confirm a passenger's flight information and vetting status without the need for our officers to see a boarding pass. The continued investment in FY21 in the CAT program supports the procurement of an additional 1,001 CAT units and associated

site remediation that will include smaller airports and 120 upgraded units to continue the pilot on self-service and camera capabilities at airports.

Identity management technologies, like CAT, enhance identity verification at the checkpoint and are integral to TSA's multi-layered security processes. In addition, they also help to provide a secure, reduced touch, and seamless customer experience. TSA is evaluating biometric technology to enhance identity verification and the customer experience in multiple ways, including conducting testing at airports and the TSA System Integration Facility.

Along with biometrics development, TSA is closely monitoring the adoption rate of digital credentials, such as mobile driver's licenses and digital passports, and evaluating their potential to provide an alternative and secure method of identity verification at airports. To this end, on April 19, 2021, DHS published a Request for Information in the *Federal Register* soliciting comments regarding technical approaches, applicable industry standards and best practices to ensure that mobile driver's licenses can be issued and authenticated with features that ensure security, privacy, and identity fraud detection. TSA is also working with industry stakeholders to explore ways to accept digital identity credentials in the airport environment. Moving forward, TSA will continue to pursue innovative solutions that allow us to improve identity management, while mitigating the potential risks that such technologies may introduce to our transportation system. By doing so, we will be better prepared to meet the challenges of evolving security threats, rising air travel volumes, resource constraints, and limits on our operational footprint.

TSA's focus on the future of screening operations also includes increased automation and reducing physical contact at the checkpoints. The Self-Service CAT with camera (CAT-2) upgrade unit recently developed by TSA promotes social distancing, reduces the need for a physical ID handoff at the Travel Document Checker, and further automates passenger screening. TSA is exploring the operational feasibility of CAT-2 at Reagan National (DCA), Miami International (MIA), Indianapolis International (IND), and Phoenix Sky Harbor International (PHX) airports. Initial assessments have been promising, and we fully expect CAT-2 to enhance the passenger experience as well as identity verification at the checkpoint.

These checkpoint technologies are just a part of TSA's multi-layered approach to transportation security. Indeed, airports and airport operators offer another critical layer of security by providing space for checkpoints and screening of checked baggage. The FY21 appropriations includes \$30 million for reimbursements to airports for legacy purchases of in-line explosive detection systems. Since FY18, TSA has, with Congress's support, provided \$130 million in reimbursements for the contributions airports made towards TSA's security mission.

FY21 also fully funded Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response teams, staffing at exit lanes, and the Law Enforcement Officer reimbursement program, which are critical protections and important deterrents to security threats. In addition, since January 9, 2021, our Federal Air Marshal Service has mitigated threats to Members of Congress and other travelers by

increasing the presence of law enforcement at airports and onboard aircraft.

To address an emerging threat to aviation security, TSA is working with federal partners, airport operators, law enforcement officials, and industry to implement the Unified National Level Response to Persistent Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) Disruption of Operations at Core 30 Airports, Concept of Operations, which are the airports serving major metropolitan areas with the highest volume of air traffic. In FY20, TSA completed vulnerability assessments and conducted table-top exercises with airport stakeholders at all Core 30 airports. By the end of calendar year 2021, 428 airport UAS table-top exercises are scheduled for completion. TSA is also currently establishing its first counter-UAS detection technology test bed at Miami International Airport (MIA) and will use the \$3 million in FY21 funding to conduct a risk analysis to select a second test bed site, conduct site evaluations, identify and install UAS detection, tracking, and identification technologies, test and evaluate technologies, and disseminate testing results to relevant stakeholders.

While the focus on technologies and emerging threats remains important in FY21, the investment in our people is crucial for the success of TSA's mission. TSA remains committed to fostering a fair and equitable workplace and promoting diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organization. To achieve this end, TSA formed an Inclusion Action Committee (IAC) devoted to strengthening and sustaining our diverse and inclusive culture to further empower and engage our employees. In support of President Biden's Executive Order on Preventing and Combatting Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation, and based on a recommendation from TSA's IAC, TSA issued a Management Directive and accompanying Handbook in April 2021. This guidance provides policy and procedures for addressing the needs and issues that arise for transitioning and transgender TSA officers, as well as TSA's equal opportunity and nondiscrimination policy as it relates to these employees and applicants for employment. TSA is at its best when all employees feel valued and are fully engaged to outmatch dynamic threats, committed adversaries, and evolving situations.

TSA is also investing in its people by working to address longstanding workforce challenges, which were highlighted in the Blue-Ribbon Panel of public and private sector human capital experts commissioned by Administrator Pekoske. In FY21, with additional funding provided for TSO Service Pay and the next phase of TSO Career Progression, TSA will continue to focus on providing transparent career progression and improving overall compensation for our TSA officers. Pursuant to its ATSA authorities, TSA has developed three initiatives to enhance TSA officer compensation: Service Pay, Career Progression, and Model Officer Recognition. Service Pay, for which \$25 million was appropriated in FY21, provides a predictable annual salary increase that acknowledges enhanced experience and skill mastery. The next phase of Career Progression, being implemented this year, was appropriated \$11.3 million and will provide a one-time pay increase for eligible E-Band officers who successfully complete certain advanced skills training and take on additional responsibilities. Finally, the Model Officer Recognition program identifies and rewards TSA's top officers in all pay bands with monetary

and non-monetary awards or pay increases for their ongoing contributions to the mission. The Model Officer pay increases, which will reflect the time period of January 1 – December 31, 2021, will occur in 2022.

We are also leveraging funding to launch efforts to recruit new employees in support of screening operations at many of TSA's approximately 430 federalized airports nationwide. With anticipated seasonal travel trends rising in the months ahead and strengthening confidence in air travel due to the progress of COVID-19 vaccinations for the general public, TSA is proactively seeking qualified candidates. As in the past, we will pursue focused veteran and military recruitment and outreach to help fill these and other important positions. As of this spring, veterans comprise nearly 10 percent of all new hires in 2020, and 20 percent of the entire TSA workforce.

The importance of recruiting talented candidates is further amplified by the continual increase in firearms detected at checkpoints nationwide. Notwithstanding the substantial decrease in passenger volume in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, TSA officers detected twice as many firearms per million passengers screened at airport security checkpoints than in 2019. Equally alarming, the vast majority of discovered firearms were loaded (approximately 83 percent in 2020, and 87 percent in 2019). TSA is committed to addressing the increase of firearms detected at security checkpoints by collaborating with government and industry partners, hiring new officers, and continuing to train and empower our screening workforce.

FY22 Discretionary Request

For FY22, the Administration released a preview of the discretionary request on April 9, 2021, that provides \$52.0 billion for DHS, approximately equal to the 2021 enacted level. Investments will continue to support the safeguarding of the American people as we respond to known and emerging threats and challenges. The request also further supports work in key areas such as research, development, and innovation, including projects on transportation security technologies. TSA looks forward to further discussions with you on FY22 after the President transmits the full budget to Congress.

Closing

TSA will continue to remain a global leader in transportation security and adapt to ever evolving challenges and requirements. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and approach the 20th anniversary of September 11th, TSA stands firm and more resolved than ever to meet the needs of our nation's security.

Chairwoman Roybal-Allard, Ranking Member Fleischmann, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to your questions.