

TESTIMONY OF

David P. Pecoske
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration

BEFORE

House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Homeland Security

ON

“Fiscal Year 2025 President’s Budget Request for the Transportation Security Administration”

April 16, 2024
Washington, D.C.

Opening/Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Joyce, Ranking Member Cuellar, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to testify on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 President's Budget request, which includes \$11.8 billion for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA). I am honored to be here and am grateful for the continued, longstanding, and productive partnership TSA enjoys with this Subcommittee, as well as all the support you have provided to the Agency over the years.

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Subcommittee and Congress for fully annualizing the new compensation system for the entire TSA workforce in the *Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024*. It has been my number one priority to bring TSA's workforce compensation levels commensurate with those of our federal government counterparts, not only because it is the right thing to do, but because it is already paying dividends in ways that will have a measurable impact on our mission performance. This compensation system now matches the minimum compensation levels with the General Schedule (GS) pay scale and as reflected in TSA's 2023 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey scores, its implementation has already improved TSA's morale and overall employee satisfaction. TSA's attrition has dropped from nearly 20 percent to roughly 11 percent today, and there has also been a rise in recruiting, hiring, and retention. With improved employee retention, TSA is able to be more selective in hiring, moving from needing to hire over 11,000 Transportation Security Officers (TSO) in 2018 to only needing to hire 9,000 TSOs in 2023, to keep up with attrition and increased passenger volumes. All of these improvements were made possible by your continued support of TSA's workforce and is fundamental to ensuring transportation security.

I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the superior efforts of the entire TSA workforce and partners from across the spectrum – from private industry to foreign partners and international organizations, advisory committees, academia, State and local governments, and federal partners. They have all helped support, strengthen, and increase TSA's collaboration, security, information sharing, and growth in customer experience in the new travel environment.

Overview of TSA

Today, within the aviation network, TSA is responsible for the security of over 440 federalized airports, with screening services forecasted this summer for over 23,000 domestic flights and nearly 2,600 outbound international flights per day. With travel volume rebounding at unprecedented rates, TSA routinely screens more than 2 million passengers, 5 million carry-on bags, and 1.4 million pieces of checked baggage daily for explosives and other dangerous items in many locations across the nation. Seven of our top 10 busiest days of all time were in 2023, with a record of over 2.9 million passengers. TSA anticipates seeing over three million passengers on a single day at some point this year. Even with these rising numbers, the TSA

workforce continues to rise to the challenge to meet the mission. I commend them for all their efforts and accomplishments, which I would like to convey now. During FY 2023, TSA:

- Implemented the new compensation system aligning TSA employee salaries with the GS scale for Federal employees.
- Completed negotiations on a new, expanded collective bargaining agreement.
- Screened over 858 million passengers, 484 million checked bags, 1.9 billion carry-on items, and pre-screened approximately 1 billion passengers through Secure Flight. TSA also screened a record of over 2.9 million passengers the Sunday after Thanksgiving.
- Reached a cumulative deployment of more than 2,000 Credential Authentication Technology (CAT) machines, with 313 systems added in FY23, including second generation, or CAT-2, upgrade kits that enable the use of mobile driver's licenses and utilize optional facial recognition technology to match credentials to the passenger, while protecting their privacy.
- Added 267 Computed Tomography (CT) X-ray scanners that produce high-quality 3-D images, which reduce the need to touch or manually check bags and eliminate the need to take electronics and travel-size liquids, aerosols, and gels out of carry-on bags.
- Updated the detection algorithm to enhance the passenger experience and improve the performance of the nearly 1,000 Advanced Imaging Technology units that safely screen passengers for on-person metallic and non-metallic threats, such as weapons and explosives, without physical contact, significantly reducing false alarms, enhancing accuracy, and reducing the number of necessary pat-downs.
- Expanded digital identity technologies that securely enhance the customer experience, including testing TSA PreCheck touchless identity solutions, and collaborating with Apple, Samsung, Delta, American Airlines, Google and other private sector partners to incorporate mobile driver's licenses into security checkpoint operations.
- Prevented a record 6,737 firearms, of which 93 percent were loaded, from getting into sterile areas and aircraft cabins. This was an increase of 195 firearms over FY 2022.
- Responded directly to three million traveler questions, typically within two minutes, over social media and via text to AskTSA 275-872. The TSA Contact Center answered 2 million traveler calls and emails, and the TSA Cares helpline assisted more than 71,000 travelers with disabilities, medical conditions, and other special circumstances.
- Celebrated the milestone of 18 million active TSA PreCheck members, enrolled a record of 4 million new members, and processed more than 1.6 million renewals. TSA also welcomed eight new airlines, added a second TSA PreCheck enrollment provider to offer travelers more options, and announced a TSA PreCheck policy change to make it easier for teenagers to accompany enrolled parents or guardians when traveling on the same reservation.
- Provided inflight security on thousands of flights and trained over 5,000 air carrier crew members in self-defense.

- Hired more than 9,000 new TSOs and Security Support Assistants. TSA also trained frontline employees at the new state-of-the-art TSA Academy West at Harry Reid International Airport in Las Vegas, Nevada, and TSA Academy East in Glynco, Georgia, where the 100,000th TSO graduated last September.
- Continued to remain deeply engaged on the evolving cyber threat. TSA issued regulatory policy in both aviation and surface domains to mitigate the cyber threat and build cyber resiliency. This effort was bolstered by TSA’s Intelligence and Analysis, who provided close to 100 cyber-threat focused briefings to internal and external stakeholders.
- TSA also maintained responsibility for surface transportation security, which is vast and purposefully open and public in nature. The surface transportation system includes:
 - *Mass transit and passenger rail*: approximately 6,800 local transit providers serving more than 34 million riders daily.
 - *Freight rail*: over 570,600 individual freight railroads, including nearly 140,000 miles of rail and more than 1.6 million freight cars handling almost 28 million carloads of vital raw materials and finished products each year.
 - *Highway and motor carrier*: 1.5 million carriers, over 1,800 over-the-road bus companies, more than 1.8 million trucking companies, and approximately 500,000 school buses transporting nearly 25 million students each day.
 - *Pipelines*: more than 3.3 million miles of pipeline, transporting over 60 percent of the U.S. energy commodities including natural gas, and crude and refined petroleum.

TSA Priorities- Vision/Strategy/Future Goals

As you know, TSA was established by the *Aviation and Transportation Security Act* in the wake of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States, and was charged with the singular mission of preventing another large-scale act of terrorism on the American transportation system. Since that day, TSA has remained steadfast in a commitment to provide the highest level of security across all modes of transportation and work with partners to stay ahead of evolving threats.

In the years since 9/11, TSA has not only had to address the ever-present physical threats to aviation, but also dynamic and emerging cybersecurity threats to our nation’s aviation, rail, hazardous liquid, and natural gas pipeline infrastructure. TSA works closely with the transportation industry to provide nimble and responsive security across all modes of transportation through passenger and cargo screening, vetting and credentialing personnel in critical transportation sectors, law enforcement, regulatory compliance, structured oversight and exercise programs, and international cooperation. TSA has also been entrusted with the REAL ID program, formerly housed within Department of Homeland Security Headquarters and is working to implement the regulations based on the *REAL ID Act of 2005*. TSA is maximizing engagement with the public, licensing jurisdictions and States, while fully focused on facilitating a smooth transition to full enforcement beginning May 7, 2025.

TSA's vision is to remain an agile, world-class security agency embodied by a professional workforce that engages transportation security partners and the traveling public to outmatch dynamic threats. To accomplish this, TSA has implemented a comprehensive governance framework that establishes a clear decision-making structure, enabling us to address current and future threats. TSA sets Agency goals via an end-to-end risk-based, strategic planning process. That is why early within my first term as Administrator, TSA collaborated with stakeholders across the transportation system to develop the 2018 – 2026 TSA Strategy, an 8-year plan highlighting the 3 key priorities necessary to fulfill TSA's mission:

- 1) Improve Security and Safeguard the Transportation System;
- 2) Accelerate Action; and
- 3) Commit to Our People. This strategy will guide us through TSA's 25th anniversary and be used to further strengthen the relationship between TSA and those we serve.

To support the TSA Strategy, as well as emphasize and reinforce accountability, I have issued subsequent execution plans called the Administrator's Intent. The documents describe short and medium-term objectives to advance TSA toward our strategic priorities. In July of 2023, I published the third edition of the Administrator's Intent. This focuses on 20 critical issues involving people, partnerships, and technology, that continues to build on TSA successes. Furthermore, TSA develops Roadmaps, aligned with the Administrator's Intent, on specific cross-cutting and emerging topics. Roadmaps articulate TSA's vision for approaching these critical areas and enable us to work together more effectively with employees and external partners to achieve shared goals and objectives. Currently, TSA has Roadmaps for Cybersecurity, Federal Air Marshal Service (FAMS), Insider Threat, Open Architecture, Air Cargo Security, Checked Baggage, Identity Management, and Biometrics. This collection of strategic documents not only guides TSA in its policy and budgetary decisions, but also serves as a way for Congress and the public to hold us accountable as good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

These comprehensive strategic planning activities inform TSA's multi-year budget planning process and Capital Investment Plan. TSA publishes its Capital Investment Plan annually and it serves as the guide for determining and prioritizing future investments critical to mission success. Last year, as directed by Congress, TSA delivered its first unconstrained Capital Investment Plan that describes an ideal future state in which TSA is able to mitigate risk to the transportation sector with additional resources. It is imperative that TSA continues to invest in, acquire, and field new technologies to strengthen transportation security.

TSA's level of success is influenced by the help of Congress, as well as our professional, vigilant, and engaged workforce. That is why "Commit to Our People" is one of TSA's three strategic priorities. The funding the Committee provided in the *Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024* allows for that continued commitment. The FY 2025 President's

Budget request includes the necessary resources to continue this commitment, including \$377 million to annualize TSA’s compensation plan adjustment.

The strategic priority of “Commit to Our People” also entails ensuring that TSA provides the workforce with necessary advanced technology to be successful. Evolving threats require an adaptable and responsive TSA; therefore, it is vitally important that we equip our people with the tools they need to combat these threats. To that end, the FY 2025 President’s Budget includes \$89.6 million and \$9.3 million to procure additional systems within the Checkpoint Property Screening System (CPSS) and CAT programs. These resources will address capability gaps to detect new and evolving threats to civil aviation in current property screening technology reliably and efficiently, all while improving the customer experience.

As of today, TSA needs a total of 3,585 CAT and 2,263 CT machines to reach full operational capability (FOC). Currently, CPSS procurements are an estimated 40 percent of FOC, which puts deployments at approximately 35 percent for CPSS and 57 percent for CAT. Based on past, present, and current projected funding, TSA will meet FOC for CAT machines in FY 2049 and CPSS in FY 2042, respectively. These timelines can improve, with your continued support, as TSA has the vendors, contracts, and processes in place to significantly reduce the time to achieve FOC. Full and dedicated funding for CPSS and CAT are imperative for the Nation’s security at airport checkpoints.

The TSA workforce consistently performs a critical national and homeland security function and the employees have done a tremendous job being diligent by monitoring the threats at these checkpoints. Here are some examples of outstanding performances: At Cleveland-Hopkins International Airport, TSO Ebony Harris was operating the X-ray machine when she pulled a bag to conduct a search. Her colleague, TSO Pia Roger discovered a stun gun, which had the appearance of a flashlight. At Jacksonville International Airport, Supervisory TSO Gabriela Fernandez and TSO JoAnn Roberson discovered 100 rounds of ammunition in a passenger’s carry-on bag along with a loaded magazine. Just before the New Year, TSA staff at Daniel K. Inouye International Airport in Honolulu, Hawaii, identified a suspicious item in a checked bag; TSO Justine Tenn and Transportation Security Specialist for Explosives Raymond Maldonado reviewed and confirmed it to be a .50 caliber anti-aircraft round. During the first two quarters of FY 2024, Federal Air Marshals, through their participation in law enforcement task forces, were instrumental in the arrests of over 200 individuals in the transportation domain. There are many more examples that reflect the accomplishments of our professional and vigilant workforce.

FY 2025 Budget Request Highlights

Looking forward into the next year, the FY 2025 President’s Budget builds upon the resources provided for in the *Further Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024*, and continues

funding for TSA's number one priority, the new compensation system. This will enable continued investment in TSA's frontline workforce, while also supporting continued innovation in technology to remain ahead of emerging threats, and resources that help maintain and strengthen partnerships to continue raising security standards. With appreciation to the Committees for providing the largest necessary increases for the compensation plan in FY 2024, the budget request includes \$377 million to account for periodic pay raises and career ladder promotions, similar to our GS counterparts, and supports a continued commitment to the entire TSA workforce. The request includes \$174 million in additional resources to support increased passenger volume for both FY 2024 and FY 2025 through increases in the screening workforce along with other volume dependent requirements, such as staffing for vetting programs and support for Federal Security Director staffs.

The budget request advances cybersecurity efforts in the transportation sector and continues procurement and deployment of CT and CAT at \$99 million, along with a request of \$18 million to drive innovation through ongoing research and development with TSA's partners. The budget balances growth and advancement with tough choices. This includes moderate growth in technology acquisitions and research and development of new technologies, continues to propose the elimination of exit lane staffing by TSOs at \$111 million, and finds efficiencies in staffing, contracts and travel for a total of \$105 million. The budget also proposes the elimination of the Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response program of \$68 million, which removes a surge capacity to protect airports and surface transportation systems. TSA's FAMS will continue to work with DHS, local law enforcement, and stakeholders to help mitigate additional risk to the transportation system. Lastly, I look forward to continuing to work with you as to how we may end the diversion of the Aviation Passenger Security Fee to deficit reduction, restoring those funds to provide for the true purpose of aviation security.

Conclusion

In closing, the FY 2025 President's Budget request aligns with TSA's strategy to improve security and safeguard the nation's transportation system, accelerate action, and reinforce TSA's commitment to advancing its mission. Thanks again to Congress for supporting TSA through the FY 2024 appropriations process. The FY 2025 President's Budget request honors commitments to TSA's workforce by providing appropriate compensation and other benefits, while addressing capability gaps to ensure that the Nation's transportation security remains the safest in the world.

Securing our Nation's transportation system is a complex task that requires robust partnerships and a well-trained, dedicated workforce. To achieve this goal and the priorities reflected within the FY 2025 President's Budget request, TSA will continue to engage with industry and stakeholders, invest resources in employees and technology, and encourage the public to be part of the solution. Finally, through constructive oversight and dialogue, TSA seeks a continued partnership with Congress as we work to secure all modes of transportation.

Chairman Joyce, Ranking Member Cuellar, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I strongly believe that the TSA priorities outlined in the FY 2025 President's Budget request are not only necessary but also vital to the economy. As always, TSA will be very responsive in addressing any questions that you might have throughout this budget process, and I look forward to this discussion and your questions. Thank you.