



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

Organizational Oversight: Examining TSA's Post-Modernization Efforts

March 12, 2024

The Transportation Security Administration has matured significantly as an agency in the years since its establishment in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks. When Congress created TSA, it granted the TSA Administrator broad authorities to determine the structure of the agency, impose security requirements across the transportation industry, and develop a unique personnel system separate from the rest of the Federal government.

Creating an agency from the ground up was a heavy lift. In my view, TSA would have been better served by sticking to existing models within the Federal government—especially the tried-and-true personnel system used by most Federal agencies, as delineated by title 5 of the U.S. Code. For many years, TSA struggled to find its footing—especially when it came to managing a large workforce that was afforded few labor rights and underpaid compared to its Federal counterparts.

Over the years, the disparities between TSA workers and other Federal employees grew and grew, as TSA workers did not receive regular salary increases provided to their peers. TSA suffered from low morale, high attrition, and a series of unfortunate headlines.

In 2018, Congress enacted the *TSA Modernization Act*, the first and still only reauthorization of the agency since its inception. The Act provided high-level direction on the organization of the agency, required TSA to carry out an efficiency review of its operations, and set a five-year term for the Administrator position to provide leadership stability.

In 2020, under Democratic control, the House passed my bill, the *Rights for Transportation Security Officers Act of 2020*, representing the first-ever passage of a bill in either chamber to place TSA workers' pay and labor rights on equal footing with the rest of the Federal government. Though we have not yet been able to get the bill through the Senate, I am grateful that we found eager partners in President Biden, Secretary Mayorkas, and Administrator Pekoske. They have all prioritized using existing authorities to address pay disparities and labor rights limitations for the TSA workforce.

In December 2022, Democrats in Congress dedicated approximately \$400 million to TSA workforce initiatives in an omnibus spending bill—historic funding which has set TSA on a better path. Last July, 30 percent pay increases hit TSA employee paychecks. Almost immediately, TSA's attrition rate dropped by 40 to 50 percent.

Higher pay will enable TSA to keep up with growing passenger loads; save money on recruiting, hiring, and training new personnel; and increase security by keeping officers with seniority and expertise within the agency. We cannot allow this progress to falter. The funding for these workforce initiatives only covered the final quarter of fiscal year 2023, and TSA is now struggling to make ends meet as we progress through 2024 still using 2023 funding levels.

We must provide TSA the funding it needs to fully annualize improvements for the workforce while remaining fully staffed and continuing to invest in technology upgrades, cybersecurity efforts, and other security programs across the transportation sector. Congress must consider all possible solutions to this funding challenge, including increasing passenger security fees that have remained stagnant for many years, despite inflation and increases in airline ticket prices.

That is why I have introduced the *Fund the TSA Act*, which would provide TSA with the resources it needs to invest in its workforce and the next generation of screening technologies by enacting a modest increase to passenger fees and indexing future fee amounts to inflation. I hope my Republican colleagues will work with me to develop a solution to TSA's pressing needs.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at 202-225-9978