



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Transportation & Maritime Security Subcommittee Chairwoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ)

Taking to the Skies: TSA's Strategy for Addressing Increased Summer Travel

July 20, 2021

As rates of vaccination against COVID-19 increase across the country, a growing number of travelers are taking to the skies once more. The numbers are striking. Indeed, on the first day of this month, TSA screened more people in a day than it did on the same day in 2019, before the pandemic. And the daily number of travelers screened at TSA checkpoints crossed the 2 million threshold multiple times in June. This is leading to fuller flights, longer lines at airports, and, it seems, higher tensions as passengers reacquaint themselves with the old and new rules of flying.

Today we will hear from our witnesses about how TSA is managing this increase in summer travel, as well as crucial information about TSA's role in addressing incidents of unruly passenger behavior at checkpoints and in the air. As travel increases, our witnesses will share what efforts TSA is undertaking to recruit and retain more Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) to ensure airports have adequate staffing. In addition, many of my colleagues and I are disturbed by the unacceptable rise in violence on planes and at airports that we have seen in the news.

As chair of this subcommittee, I am particularly perturbed by the number of violent assaults against our TSOs in recent months. More than 70 TSOs have been assaulted since the start of the pandemic. These hardworking men and women have been on the front lines throughout the pandemic, and simply should not have to endure this kind of treatment.

Another alarming trend we are seeing is the uptick in firearms – most of them loaded – that have been found in passengers' carry-on baggage. According to TSA, 2,800 firearms have been caught at checkpoints so far this year. I am hopeful that our witnesses will share their perspectives on these encounters and what can be done to prevent them.

While the pace of recovery in air travel is encouraging, we must not forget that the coronavirus, and particularly the dangerous Delta variant, is still at large. The mask mandate aboard planes and in airports remains in place until September 13, and now is not the time to let our foot off the gas in terms of doing all that we can to prevent the virus's spread. As more travelers take to the air, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about TSA's strategy thus far and future plans.

#

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978