



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS), Chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security

Floor Statement in support of H.R. 903, the *Rights for the TSA Workforce Act of 2022*

May 12, 2022

This critical legislation will bring equity and improved working conditions to the Transportation Security Administration by providing better pay, expanded collective bargaining rights, and basic civil service protections to the agency's workforce.

The essential employees of the TSA have continued to work throughout the pandemic, never relenting in their mission to secure air travel despite the risks to their health.

They did so before the pandemic and continue to do so now, despite enduring two decades of low pay and a lack of the basic workplace rights enjoyed by most other Federal workers.

These shortcomings have led to low morale and high turnover, impacting TSA's ability to cultivate a mature workforce that can skillfully combat the constantly evolving threats to our Nation's transportation systems.

In 2020, TSA ranked dead last on pay satisfaction as part of the annual "Best Places to Work in the Federal Government" survey.

In addition, the most recent analysis done of employee turnover at TSA shows that, over a two-year span, one in three Transportation Security Officers, or "TSOs", quit.

That analysis also revealed that in a single year, TSA spent approximately \$16 million to hire and onboard nearly 2,000 people who left just months after they got the job.

This revolving door of recruiting, training, and then losing TSOs is unsustainable and underscores the need to find a permanent solution that will ensure TSA lives up to its critical national security mission.

H.R. 903 would permanently move TSA under title 5 of U.S. Code and eliminate the existing personnel management system that is the source of many of the problems I have enumerated.

This bill will result in better pay and regular salary increases for workers who too often live paycheck to paycheck and experience long paths to career advancement, despite years on the job.

Employees will benefit from the same collective bargaining rights under H.R. 903 that other Federal employees have, empowering them to collaborate with TSA management to improve working conditions at the agency.

Employees who believe they have experienced wrongful discipline could appeal their case to a neutral party to be heard, just as other Federal employees are able to do.

It would eliminate TSA leadership's ability to abuse special personnel authorities in ways that have historically benefitted those at the top.

TSA management would still be able to remove employees from duty if they could compromise the mission of the agency.

Furthermore, just like any other unionized Federal agency, TSA's security procedures would not be subject to collective bargaining with the workforce.

We are fortunate to have an administration in the White House that understands the importance of making these changes.

This week, the Biden Administration issued a Statement of Administration Policy voicing "strong support" for the bill and noting it is in line with the President's budget request for 2023.

I also applaud the Biden Administration for the steps it has taken on its own over the last year to expand employees' access to the Merit Systems Protection Board and explore expanded collective bargaining and increased pay for the workforce.

About a year ago, the Secretary of Homeland Security released a memo that instructed the TSA Administrator to make progress on improving pay, collective bargaining, and third-party appeal rights.

And laudably, the President's Budget for FY23 includes a historic proposal to invest in the TSA workforce in these ways. But crucially, the changes would only apply to the coming fiscal year.

That is why it is so essential to pass H.R. 903—so that future administrations cannot turn back the clock on these frontline aviation security workers.

We all know that the nature of an investment is that you have to put some money in up front to see a return later.

Unlike a typical investment, however, we already have a snapshot into the financial benefit this legislation would yield for workers.

Earlier this year, TSA shared with us that passage of H.R. 903 would result in a 30% salary increase for the entire TSO workforce, and a 21% increase for federal air marshals and other law enforcement officers within the agency—bringing them in line with their peers doing similar work at other agencies.

That is astounding. And it is the least we can do for the men and women we see each week as we pass through our home airports on the way to Washington.

H.R. 903 has 231 bipartisan cosponsors and is strongly supported by the American Federation of Government Employees, the Air Marshal Association, the Association of Flight Attendants, the Transport Workers Union of America, the Transportation Trades Department, AFL-CIO, and the National Urban League.

The momentum we need to vote this legislation over the finish line is there, and I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle will honor the work of our TSOs and the commitments they have made to them by voting for this bill.