



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Transportation & Maritime Security Subcommittee

Ranking Member Shri Thanedar (D-MI)

Identity Management Innovation: Looking Beyond REAL ID

December 5, 2023

Record numbers of passengers are traveling through Transportation Security Administration security checkpoints, with TSA recently screening a record 2.9 million people in a single day. TSA is charged with verifying the identity of each and every passenger entering a checkpoint and ensuring each passenger receives the appropriate level of screening based on the risk they pose.

As TSA approaches the deadline for requiring passengers to show REAL ID-compliant identification in May 2025, the agency must enhance public awareness efforts to ensure all passengers have compliant IDs. Our crowded aviation system cannot afford the chaos of thousands of passengers arriving to TSA checkpoints without acceptable identification.

Recently, TSA has begun piloting next-generation technologies for managing and verifying identities. In eight states, passengers can now use mobile driver's licenses to access screening checkpoints. And in 25 locations, TSA is using facial recognition technology to match passengers to their IDs. Digital IDs and facial recognition technology both offer the potential for security enhancements and convenience—but the potential downsides are grave.

TSA must prioritize protections for privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties, even to an extreme degree. TSA's efforts to advance these technologies may set the standard for other sectors—so TSA must go out of its way and take the time to do things the right way. TSA seems to be in a hurry to fast forward into the future with these technologies, even as it allows vulnerabilities within existing identity verification processes to persist.

Late last year, TSA notified Congress of security incidents that have occurred within the Registered Traveler program operated by CLEAR. This program has allowed some travelers to enter security checkpoints using fraudulent identities. In one instance, an individual picked a boarding pass out of a trash can and was able to use it to go through screening because a CLEAR employee falsely told TSA they had verified the individual's identity.

Addressing these vulnerabilities does not require any futuristic technology or creative solution; it simply requires TSA to stop outsourcing identity verification functions to a corporation seeking to make a profit. Vetting and verifying passenger identities are inherently governmental functions. For nearly a year, Ranking Member Thompson has been calling for TSA to require all passengers to go through TSA's own identity verification processes. TSA could mandate such a requirement today.

I urge TSA to spend a little less time fast-forwarding into the future and instead focus on addressing security vulnerabilities that threaten the aviation system today.

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