



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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

The State of the Transportation Security Administration

May 26, 2022

I would like to acknowledge the horrific shooting that occurred at an elementary school in Texas this week. My heart goes out to the victims and their families, and my gratitude goes to the first responders and medical professionals who helped prevent more loss of life and are continuing to provide care to victims. It is unfathomable that we are dealing with a situation so similar to the Sandy Hook massacre nearly ten years later—and still, we seem incapable of taking action to prevent more tragedies from occurring. To those who stand in the way of sensible gun reform measures supported by a strong majority of Americans, I ask: When will it be enough?

Turning to today's topic, I thank our witness, Administrator David Pekoske, for joining us today to discuss the state of the TSA and the agency's budget request for Fiscal Year 2023. President Biden recently announced his intent to nominate Administrator Pekoske for a second five-year term as TSA Administrator. In that position, Administrator Pekoske faces an enormous task. After more than two years of depressed air travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic, more and more people are booking flights to go on vacation, visit family members, and do business. Passenger volumes in airports and aboard airplanes are approaching pre-pandemic levels, which equates to a heightened demand for TSA's services, especially as the busy summer travel season approaches.

The President's budget request contains several proposals to help TSA prepare for the 4.5 percent increase in travelers over pre-pandemic levels that the agency expects in FY2023. Most notably, the budget request contains a historic proposal to invest in our Transportation Security Officers, or TSOs, by raising their pay, expanding their collective bargaining rights, and enhancing their access to the Merit Systems Protection Board. The proposal would increase TSO pay by 30 percent on average, finally providing pay in line with what workers at other government agencies receive for similar work. Improving pay and workplace rights is essential to addressing TSA's longstanding challenges with employee morale and retention.

I was proud to vote in favor of Chairman Thompson's related bill, H.R. 903, the *Rights for the TSA Workforce Act of 2022*, when it passed the House two weeks ago. We must build on that momentum and fully fund the budget proposal's workforce initiatives, as well as enact H.R. 903 to make these changes permanent. Unfortunately, the budget request does not include a serious proposal for paying for these initiatives. The budget proposes reclaiming approximately \$1.5 billion in revenue from aviation security fees that are slated to go toward reducing the deficit in FY23.

While I support ending the diversion of these fees, the legislative proposal submitted by the Administration would treat these funds as offsetting collections, so TSA's direct appropriations would be reduced on a dollar-for-dollar basis for each fee dollar returned to the agency. Doing so would be a change in accounting but would not increase the total funding available to TSA. Nevertheless, as the

Chairwoman of this Subcommittee and a member of the Appropriations Committee, I am committed to finding a solution to this budget shortfall.

In addition to investing in TSA's people, the budget request reflects TSA's plan to continue operationalizing innovative technology that will screen passengers and their belongings more quickly and effectively. As part of those efforts, TSA proposes \$107.6 million for Computed Tomography (CT) equipment through the Checkpoint Property Screening System, or CPSS program, to screen passenger property at airport checkpoints. I am a supporter of the CPSS program along with many of my colleagues on this committee on both sides of the aisle. Acquiring and deploying CT machines at the rate needed to counter current threats to transportation will require more than the budget's proposal, which would not put TSA on pace to finish deploying machines to every screening lane until FY2036. This program should be funded at a level closer to the \$336 million authorized for FY23 under Ranking Member Katko's bill, H.R. 6827, which this Committee advanced in March.

When it comes to technology investments, I also believe TSA must be more robust in its efforts to provide opportunities to small and minority-owned businesses in order to drive competition and innovation. I have only scratched the surface of important issues facing TSA. I hope we will have time to explore others today, such as firearm encounters at checkpoints, cybersecurity efforts, counter-drone authorities, and surface transportation security in light of the recent shooting on the New York City Subway.

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