

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson*****Last Line of Defense: the Federal Air Marshal Service 10 Years After 9/11***

February 16, 2012 (Washington) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the Transportation Security subcommittee hearing on “Last Line of Defense: the Federal Air Marshal Service 10 Years After 9/11”:

“In July of 2009, this Committee’s Subcommittee on Management, Investigation, and Oversight held a hearing on FAMS personnel issues. Director Bray was a witness at that hearing and will appear before this subcommittee today. At that the hearing in 2009, Director Bray acknowledged that retaliation had been an ongoing problem across FAMS. Director Bray promised to fix this problem. Clearly, by no remedial action was taken.

Today, 47% of FAMS believe that retaliation is part and parcel of the FAMS workplace. I am not a management expert. But I know that if half of your workforce will admit to believing something, the other half believe it but won’t admit to it. And so as we begin today’s hearing, I need to focus on the practical ramifications of having 47% of your workforce believe that retaliation is a way of life.

In the most recent report released by the Inspector General, he noted that many discrimination complaints had been filed. However, he also noted that the overwhelming majority of those complaints had been resolved in favor of the agency.

I have no doubt that the Director and others will testify that these favorable resolutions mean that the agency is free of discrimination. Luckily, I was not born yesterday. I know that in order to win a discrimination complaint, there must be evidence and there must be witnesses.

That gets me back to the 47% who fear retaliation. In an agency in which almost half of the employees fear retaliation, few will speak up. Few will testify. So few cases will be won by employees. Given these practical considerations, I do not believe that anyone should make proud assertions about a lack of discrimination at FAMS.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I want to be very clear. The flying FAMS have an exemplary record of protecting the flying public. But I must admit that it may be miraculous that their job performance has not been adversely affected by the dysfunctional environment of the FAMS field offices.

So today, I want to take a moment to commend each flying FAM for the work they do. But we cannot continue to take this work for granted. How much longer are we willing to risk that the well-documented dysfunction of these offices does not affect the performance of the flying FAMS? As Members of this Committee, we need to take a long and hard look at this agency and make leadership changes that will preserve and protect the safety of the flying public.”

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