

Statement of Ranking Member Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)

Subcommittee on Transportation Security

Hearing “Is TSA's Planned Purchase of CAT/BPSS a Wise Use of Taxpayer Dollars?”

June 19, 2012

Thank you for holding today’s hearing. I know from our discussions, that we share the same commitment to securing our Nation’s transportation systems. We also share the same commitment to ensuring that technologies procured by the Department are acquired after a robust testing and evaluation process. Today marks the fourth hearing this Subcommittee has held regarding the procurement practices at the Department on transportation security technologies. Although I welcome the deliberate oversight of procurement practices carried out by this Subcommittee, I respectfully reassert my request that we hold a hearing evaluating TSA’s in-cabin security efforts.

As we learned on September 11th, if all else fails, the cabin of an airplane may become our last line of defense. Today, we will hear from the Transportation Security Administration and the Government Accountability Office regarding the procurement goals by TSA on CAT/BPSS.

This system has been deployed for testing at three major airports since last April. As of today, TSA is still working on reviewing the data it gathered from testing and evaluating this technology in real-life conditions. This is a critical step in assessing the effectiveness of any piece of technology. As we learned from the “puffer machines,” what works in the lab may not work in real life. I look forward to hearing from TSA about its preliminary findings on the performance of this technology. I also look forward to hearing about the risk analysis TSA conducted on the use of fraudulent documents by potential terrorists.

Last year, the media exposed an incident in which a 24-year-old man was arrested after attempting to board a flight from Los Angeles Airport to Atlanta using outdated boarding passes. What was even more alarming was the fact that this same individual had already navigated layers of security at JFK and boarded a flight using an outdated boarding pass to fly to Los Angeles International Airport. This incident underscored the need for additional training and technology to enable TSOs to detect fraudulent documents. Since that incident, TSA has been working to identify technological solutions to resolve the problem of detecting fraudulent documents. The system we will hear about today—*CAT/BPSS*—may be one possible technological solution.

I look forward to today’s testimony from GAO and TSA. I hope each will shed light on the procurement process used to identify the type of technology needed to address this vulnerability. As we all know, this Subcommittee has been particularly interested in ensuring that the procurement goals set forth by the Department are administered by the Undersecretary of Management and those at TSA.

Last fall, Mr. Chairman, you held three hearings that examined the practices used to evaluate, procure and deploy technology across our transportation security system. During those hearings, we heard from former Homeland Security Officials. They testified about the need for greater cooperation between business and government in developing contract requirements for major research projects.

While this is an interesting thought, as you know, the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR) have strict rules about the depth and breadth of permissible discussions between government and industry prior to the announcement of a contracting opportunity. I think those hearings also made clear that this Administration has taken action on how TSA and S&T can improve their collaboration. Congress needs to support and encourage efforts to assure that government is more efficient and genuinely meets the needs of its customers—the American taxpayer.

Unfortunately, the current budgetary atmosphere will take its toll on the Department. With a proposed \$50 million reduction in the Republican House appropriations bill, the Undersecretary of Management the progress of integrating procurement practices at the Department and improving its efficiency and effectiveness will be blunted.

Mr. Chairman, we cannot use money to fill every security gap. However, we cannot ignore the necessity for funding when vulnerabilities are identified. I look forward to a determination about the problem this procurement is intended to solve. And if that determination finds that we need to spend the money, I hope my colleagues on the other side will join me in seeking appropriate funding.