

Ranking Member Kathleen Rice Opening Statement

Subcommittee on Transportation Security

Subcommittee Markup of HR 2770 & HR 2750

Tuesday, June 16, 2015

I am pleased that the Subcommittee is considering measures today that address troubling findings by the Department of Homeland Security's Inspector General about key TSA programs.

As discussed at the hearing, there are a range of activities that TSA must undertake to enhance the integrity and effectiveness of its vetting program for airport workers.

While it is good to see that there has been some progress since the Inspector General issued his report, I believe that legislative action is necessary for TSA to follow through and deliver meaningful improvements.

That is why I support H.R. 2750, as introduced by Chairman Katko. If enacted, it will put TSA on the right path to addressing the wide-ranging security challenges within its airport worker vetting program.

Like H.R. 2750, the bill that I authored, H.R. 2770, the "Keeping our Travelers Safe and Secure Act," will implement important reforms that the Inspector General has recommended.

Last month, in a report entitled "The Transportation Security Administration Does Not Properly Manage Its Airport Screening Equipment Maintenance Program," the Inspector General found that TSA lacks adequate policies and processes to maintain essential airport security equipment – and that deficiency creates significant risks to airport security and passenger safety.

Routine maintenance of x-ray machines and explosive detection systems is essential for extending the life of this equipment and keeping it fully operational. Yet, today, TSA has no way of knowing whether or not such maintenance is carried out on a consistent basis.

As the IG's report noted, the risk here is that if lack of regular maintenance reduces the life of screening equipment or it becomes less than fully operational, TSA will have to incur the cost to replace it. But more importantly, in the meantime, TSA will have to rely on other screening measures that may be less effective at detection.

At a time when people are rightfully concerned about TSA's ability to detect dangerous items, that's a risk we simply cannot afford.

So maintaining security equipment is not only important to TSA's bottom line, but essential to its operations and, in turn, essential to airport security and passenger safety.

Specifically, my bill would require the TSA Administrator to develop and implement a preventative maintenance validation process for security related technology in our nation's airports. This process must be developed and implemented within 180 days, and it must include specific maintenance schedules, guidance for TSA personnel and contractors on how to conduct and document maintenance actions, mechanisms to insure compliance, and penalties for noncompliance.