

*Opening Statement of Ranking Member Kathleen Rice*

*Subcommittee on Transportation Security*

**Hearing - “Examining the Federal Air Marshal Service and Its Readiness to Meet the Evolving Threat”**

**July 16, 2015**

---

I understand that this is the first time since 2012 that a panel in this Committee has discussed the Federal Aviation Marshal Service – so it’s clearly important that we do so, and I want to thank our witnesses for their participation today. Prior to September 11, the Federal Air Marshal Service consisted of only 33 full-time sky marshals. The 9/11 attacks made it clear that we needed a much greater presence on commercial aircrafts to counter the threat of individuals attempting to gain access to a cockpit.

In the wake of 9/11, the Federal Air Marshal Service was rapidly expanded through the Aviation Transportation Security Act of 2002. Six hundred (600) marshals were hired, trained and activated within a month, and thousands more were activated in the months that followed.

The Federal Air Marshal Service, as well as Federal Flight Deck Officers, serves as one of the last lines of defense for both domestic and international flights. We know that the threats against our country – particularly against our aviation sector – are constantly evolving, and have only increased in the years since 9/11. We must ensure that our Air Marshal Service is also evolving and maintaining the strength needed to counter these threats and keep passengers safe.

That’s why we’re here today. There are a number of concerning issues with the current state of the Federal Air Marshal Service. First and foremost, the dwindling ranks of the Service. There has not been a new Federal Air Marshal Service class in four years. When you couple this with high attrition and poor retention rates, it’s clear that the organization is shrinking dramatically – and it also raises serious questions about workforce morale.

And as the workforce is dwindling, so is the number of Federal Air Marshals field offices. Last year, there were 26 nationwide. Currently, there are 22, with two more scheduled to close in 2016 – which will bring us down to 20 field offices within the next year. I understand that these closures are determined by complex risk analyses, and by the fact that there tends to be fluctuation in which areas around the country are commercial aviation hubs. But we need to be certain that none of this compromises security on commercial flights, and we need to ensure that marshals are transitioning to openings in other field offices as efficiently as possible.

I’m eager to hear from Assistant Administrator Allison about the details of these closures and what measures are in place to help with this transition, as well as details of what outreach efforts are being undertaken to improve workforce morale. I also look forward to hearing greater detail from Captain Canoll about other layers of security aboard planes, such as Federal Flight Deck Officers and enhanced barriers.

The selfless pilots who volunteer for this program are subjected to intense training and prepare themselves to dangerous threats on commercial aircrafts. I am eager to learn more about the level of training they receive and how their regimen is evolving to counter current security threats.