



TESTIMONY OF

**Darby LaJoye
Executive Assistant Administrator, Security Operations**

and

**Michael Ondocin
Executive Assistant Administrator, Law Enforcement – Federal Air Marshal Service**

**Transportation Security Administration
U.S. Department of Homeland Security**

BEFORE

**House Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security**

ON

**"TSA Summer Airport Operations, Staffing, and
Federal Air Marshal Service Operations."**

**July 20, 2021
Washington, DC**

Good morning Chairwoman Watson Coleman, Ranking Member Gimenez, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting us to testify before you today and we appreciate the opportunity to discuss Transportation Security Administration's (TSA's) operations.

First and foremost, we would like to recognize TSA's workforce – our Transportation Security Officers (TSOs), Federal Air Marshals, canine teams, inspectors, and other aviation and surface personnel – for their hard work and dedication during these unprecedented and

challenging times. Our workforce has and continues to effectively execute the mission in a professional manner and adapt to accommodate various challenges, including increased travel volume as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic as well as a growing number of incidents stemming from unruly passengers. Their hard work and vigilance allowed more than 10.1 million travelers over the Fourth of July holiday weekend to safely and securely fly to and from their destinations in order to see loved ones, family, and friends—many for the first time since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Thursday, July 1st was the busiest air travel day of the weekend, with TSA screening 2,147,090 people, which is slightly more than the 2,088,760 travelers screened on Thursday of the Fourth of July weekend in 2019. Daily airport passenger volumes are finally nearing, and occasionally exceeding, pre-pandemic levels as more people are getting vaccinated and travel restrictions are easing around the world. While the COVID-19 pandemic has tested our agility, the resiliency of our workforce, and the strength of our partnerships, TSA has adapted and maintained our security mission while working to ensure the health and safety of both our valued employees and the traveling public.

In less than two months, the Nation will mark 20 years since the September 11th terrorist attacks. As we approach this milestone and emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, TSA remains focused on protecting the nation’s transportation systems. To achieve our mission, we have been guided by our continuing vision to be an agile security agency that engages its partners and the American people to outmatch a dynamic threat.

COVID-19 Response

After the emergence of COVID-19, airport passenger screening volumes dropped as much as 97-percent, and TSA adapted our operations to protect the TSA workforce, traveling public, and other transportation workers from this global threat.

Throughout the pandemic, TSA diligently followed guidance issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and DHS, provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to our workforce, developed and implemented new protocols to support social distancing, and implemented other required standards and procedures. Our “Stay Healthy. Stay Secure.” campaign detailed the measures we implemented at security checkpoints across the nation to make the screening process safer for passengers and our workforce by reducing the potential of exposure to COVID-19.

In February 2021, in close coordination with our stakeholders, TSA implemented provisions of President Biden's Executive Order on Promoting COVID-19 Safety in Domestic and International Travel and enforced the related CDC Order by requiring travelers to wear face masks when they are in airports, bus and rail stations, as well as while on passenger aircraft, public transportation, passenger railroads, and over-the-road buses operating on scheduled fixed-routes.

Our efforts to protect the workforce and traveling public, including the deployment of technologies to reduce contact between TSOs and passengers and their property, helped restore confidence that it is healthy and safe to travel. Those endeavors paved the way for the increased passenger volumes we are now seeing at airports around the country.

Aviation Security Incident Trends

TSA has unfortunately seen an increase in unruly passengers at TSA checkpoints across the country and onboard aircraft. Since the beginning of the pandemic, there have been over 70 physical assaults on TSA officers and 3,600 inflight disturbances. Before the pandemic, in 2019, there were 1,230 inflight disturbances, which was approximately two incidents per one million passengers screened. Preliminarily, as of early July 2021, there have been 2,838 inflight incidents thus far in 2021, which is approximately 12 incidents per one million passengers screened. This shows a dramatic increase in the number of incidents onboard aircraft, which occur for a variety of reasons, many of which are mask-related, frequently leading to agitated passengers who at times have become violent towards fellow passengers and the flight crew. Our industry partners have reported an increase in assaults in other modes of transportation as well.

Additionally, TSA continues to detect firearms on passengers and in carry-on bags at checkpoints at an alarming rate. Preliminarily, as of early July, TSA detected 2,807 firearms in 2021, 85-percent of which were loaded. In 2020, TSA officers discovered a total of 3,257 firearms on passengers or in their carry-on bags at checkpoints, which was approximately 10 firearms per million passengers screened. Comparatively in 2019, the number was about five firearms per million passengers screened.

To increase awareness on the requirements for properly transporting firearms, TSA enhanced communication and outreach efforts with the public and stakeholders. In February 2021, TSA published updated Enforcement Sanctions Guidance increasing the suggested civil

penalty ranges TSA may impose. For first time violations, TSA can impose a fine of up to \$10,000 if the firearm is loaded.

Summer Travel

The summer travel season has begun and TSA's diligent preparation has ensured it is ready for passenger volume to return. TSA anticipated this increase and began a concerted recruitment effort this past winter to hire the support needed to handle these increasing volumes throughout the remainder of the year. We also took additional measures such as converting part-time employees to full-time, increasing employee overtime, and adjusting shifts to support airline schedules. TSA is also utilizing several monetary incentives to retain our valued workforce and ensure adequate staffing levels.

Those efforts are already paying dividends. Over the July 4th holiday travel period, TSA screened more than 10.1 million passengers, with 98-percent waiting less than 20 minutes in standard lanes and 97-percent waiting less than five minutes in TSA PreCheck® lanes. More importantly, there were no major security incidents impacting the transportation sector. We are confident that TSA is prepared and well-positioned to continue to effectively meet increasing passenger volumes through the remainder of the year.

Technology Advancements

Air travelers coming to checkpoints for the first time since before the pandemic may see some changes in security technology they encounter. Throughout the pandemic, TSA worked in close partnership with DHS Science and Technology to accelerate deployment of state-of-the-art technologies, such as Computed Tomography (CT), Credential Authentication Technology (CAT), and On-Person Screening enhancements. These technologies and enhancements represent significant advancements from current equipment used for identity verification and the screening of accessible property, reduce overall contact during screening, and improve the passenger experience. Major technological advancements include:

- Computed Tomography, or CT, produces high-quality 3-D images that can be rotated up to 360 degrees on three axes for a more thorough visual analysis of a carry-on bag's contents and reduces the need to touch or manually check bags.
- Credential Authentication Technology, or CAT, machines automatically verify

identification documents presented by passengers during the security screening process and confirm a passenger's flight information and vetting status without the need for our officers to see a boarding pass. TSA has worked to modify CAT machines to allow self-service operation, so passengers can scan their own photo ID without our Officers touching the document. Additionally, the Self-Service CAT with camera (CAT-2) upgrade units promote social distancing, reduce the need for a physical ID handoff at the Travel Document Checker, and make passenger screening more automated.

- Advanced Imaging Technology, or AIT, safely screens passengers without physical contact for both metallic and non-metallic threats such as weapons and explosives. Enhancements have reduced the number of false alarms at the checkpoint and touchpoints by using even more sophisticated millimeter wave technology.

As of early July 2021, TSA has deployed 300 CT systems at 141 airports and four laboratories, as well as 1,053 CAT units at 119 airports and two laboratories. The continued investment of FY21 appropriated funds supports the procurement and deployment of additional systems CT and CAT systems that will include smaller airports.

In addition to these checkpoint technologies our biometric technology pilots have shown the potential for modern identity technology to enhance security effectiveness, improve operational efficiency, and yield a more streamlined passenger experience in the post-pandemic travel era. Along with biometrics development, digital credentials, such as mobile driver's licenses and digital passports, are becoming increasingly common. To further support the touchless experience at the checkpoint, TSA is actively exploring the integration of a mobile driver's license and other digital credential authentication capability with CAT-2 to process digital identity information and verify a person's identity at the airport checkpoint.

Since TSA's inception, we have continuously refined and evolved our security approach by examining the procedures and technologies we use to secure our Nation's transportation systems. Technology advancements are just a part of TSA's multi-layered approach to ensuring transportation security.

Multi-Layered Approach to Security

An integral part of TSA's multi-layered approach to security, especially as passenger levels return to pre-pandemic levels, are TSA's Passenger Screening Canine (PSC) teams. PSC

teams strengthen checkpoint screening effectiveness, improve checkpoint efficiency, and provide an agile and adaptable resource to expand TSA's detection capabilities. The focus for TSA's PSC program is improving detection at TSA checkpoints and deterring insider threats in the airport environment. PSC teams are a cost-effective resource that provides valuable security enhancements and growth in this capability is important for future years.

In addition to PSC teams, the Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) Program ensures that both aviation and surface transportation hubs do not become targets for our adversaries. The Federal Air Marshal Service (FAMS) works closely with federal, state and local law enforcement partners and stakeholders to conduct VIPR operations in all modes of transportation using a risk-based assessment framework. Through the third quarter of FY2021, VIPR Teams have conducted approximately 5,600 deployments at transportation venues nationwide to include National Special Security Events, like the Presidential Inauguration and the Presidential Address to the Joint Session of Congress, and Special Event Assessment Rating activities, such as the Super Bowl LV, the NCAA Men's Basketball Championship, and the recent 4th of July Fireworks events in San Diego, San Francisco, and New York City.

Federal Air Marshal Service

From the visible VIPR operations to covert flight coverage, the FAMS and its dedicated ranks of Federal Air Marshals (FAMs) continued its mission throughout the pandemic despite the significant drop in passenger volume. FAMs deploy on domestic and international flights based on intelligence and risk while maintaining the longstanding capability to redeploy FAMs based on changing intelligence and potential threats. FAMs are trained to take swift, decisive action based on the totality of the circumstances surrounding incidents onboard an aircraft and are prepared to appropriately respond to a variety of situations and challenges associated with preventing and disrupting acts of terrorism across the transportation domain. However, they are not the only line of defense onboard an aircraft.

Airline flight crew members are yet another layer of security and work in conjunction with the FAMS to ensure the safety of passengers. Since 2004, TSA has delivered the Crew Member Self Defense Program (CMSD), through a voluntary program of advanced self-defense training which includes classroom and effective hands-on training. The CMSD training curriculum includes a wide range of self-defense techniques with special emphasis on the airline

crew deck environment. CMSD training classes are conducted in cities throughout the country where FAMS offices are located and as requested with specific airlines.

The Federal Flight Deck Officer (FFDO) Program, also managed by the FAMS, provides an additional layer of security to commercial airliners and, in particular, the flight deck from terrorist and criminal assault. FFDOs are pilots of commercial passenger or cargo aircraft who are trained to provide an additional layer of security by defending the flight deck against an act of criminal violence and air piracy that is attempting to gain control of the flight deck. TSA is grateful for the thousands of FFDOs who volunteer their service and perform a vital role in our national security aboard thousands of passenger and cargo flights monthly.

Closing

TSA remains dedicated to securing the Nation's transportation systems from terrorist attacks. As we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and approach the 20th anniversary of September 11th, TSA stands firm and more resolved than ever to meet the needs of our Nation's security. We are focused on improving transportation security through TSA's multi-layered approach to security and the development and implementation of intelligence-driven, risk based policies and plans. We appreciate the Subcommittee's continued support of TSA's mission and investments in the technology to keep the public safe.

Chairwoman Watson Coleman, Ranking Member Gimenez, and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for your continued support and engagement on these efforts and the opportunity to appear before you today. We look forward to answering any questions you may have.