Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)

The Public Face of TSA: Examining the Agency's Outreach and Traveler Engagement Efforts

Subcommittee on Transportation & Protective Security

February 27, 2018

The TSA screener workforce has a complex security mission, with more than two million passengers traveling through security checkpoints on any given day. As threats evolve, so do TSA's security measures.

Given the volume of passengers and the frequency with which security screening procedures change, it is critical that TSA communicates effectively with the flying public.

In the years since TSA was established, Americans have experienced a wide range of changes to the checkpoint screening experience. Passengers have had to remove shoes, carry smaller containers of liquids, undergo hand-swabbing, go through body scanners, and be subject to a host of other security protocols.

TSA has established a number of platforms to try to improve information sharing and outreach to the flying public, but more needs to be done to improve not only information-sharing but also the screening experience.

Indeed, while today's hearing is mainly focused on improving communications with the public, how the public perceives TSA comes down to what passengers experience at the checkpoint.

I have long had concerns about TSA's behavioral detection program and the potential for discriminatory treatment. As the GAO has repeatedly observed, TSA has never been able to effectively validate its program as an effective security measure through peer-reviewed scientific evidence.

Yet today, TSA trains its entire workforce on behavior detection practices. These practices open the door to racial profiling and sow distrust and resentment among the traveling public.

As for communicating with the traveling public about its security procedures, TSA must do a better job across the board and particularly with populations

disproportionately affected. For example, in 2017, TSA took two important steps to improve security for aviation—a temporary laptop ban and changing divestment procedures.

While both changes stepped up security, they caused concern for passengers who were unsure what procedures they would undergo and whether they would be forced to leave their electronic devices at the checkpoint.

I want to encourage TSA to continue its engagement with stakeholders and passengers to communicate policies and procedures and solicit feedback. TSA must become a nimble organization able to adjust its policies based on feedback it receives.

While TSA cannot make sure every passenger is always 100% satisfied, TSA can ensure that no passengers are discriminated against as a result of its procedures. I look forward to today's conversation on how TSA can continue to improve its engagement with the public.

# # #

Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978