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On Behalf of the American Association of Airport Executives
Before the House Homeland Security Subcommittee on Transportation Security
Hearing on the MODERN Security Credentials Act
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Chairman Rogers, Ranking Member Jackson Lee, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the MODERN Security Credentials Act, legislation aimed at consolidating and harmonizing the federal security threat assessment (STA) process for transportation workers. We appreciate your recognition of the critical role that airports play – and must continue to play – working with the federal government to protect vital and security sensitive airport facilities.

I am appearing today on behalf of the American Association of Airport Executives, which represents thousands of men and women across the country who operate and manage the nation's airports. I am actively involved with AAAE as Vice Chair of the association's Transportation Security Services Committee and as Chair of the Biometric Airport Security Identification Consortium or BASIC initiative, an airport-led effort to create a biometric-based solution for airport badging and access control. I currently serve as Assistant Director, Aviation Security & Technology for the Aviation Department of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. In this capacity, I oversee security operations for New York's Kennedy and La Guardia airports and for Newark Liberty International Airport and Stewart International Airport.

As you know, airports play a unique and critical role in aviation security, serving as an important partner to the Transportation Security Administration in helping the agency meet its core mission of passenger and baggage screening. The significant changes that have taken place in airports over the past decade with the creation of the TSA and its assumption of all screening duties have been aided dramatically by the work of the airport community, and we will continue to serve as a critical local partner to the agency as it continually modifies its operations.

In addition to partnering with TSA to meet its core mission, airports as public entities also perform a number of inherently local security-related functions at their facilities, including incident response and management, perimeter security, employee badging and credentialing, access control, infrastructure and operations planning, and a myriad of local law enforcement functions. These important duties have long been local responsibilities that have been performed by local authorities in accordance with federal standards under federal oversight.

Airport operators meet their security-related obligations with a sharp focus on the need to protect public safety, which remains one of their fundamental missions. The professionals who perform these duties at airports are highly trained and have the first responder duties that I know each and every member of this subcommittee, the Congress, and the country value immensely. From a security and resource perspective, it is critical that these inherently local functions remain local with federal oversight and backed by federal resources when appropriate.

Preserving the Local Role of Airports with Badging and Access Control is Critical

As this subcommittee and Congress contemplate changes aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the federal STA process for the various transportation worker populations who are required to

have these checks, it is important to understand and protect the unique role that airports play with regard to the overall background screening process for aviation workers and with badging and access control at their facilities.

In the aviation environment, the background check process for workers operates successfully as a federal/local partnership with the federal government holding sole responsibility for STAs and other necessary government checks for prospective workers and with local airport authorities operating and managing enrollment, credentialing, badging, criminal history background check adjudication and access control systems in accordance with strict federal standards.

The current system for aviation ensures the highest level of security by combining the unique local experience, expertise, and knowledge that exists at individual airports regarding facilities and personnel with federal standardization, federal oversight, and federal vetting assets. Local involvement provides a critical layer of security and gives airports the operational control they require to ensure that qualified employees receive the credentials they need to work in the airport environment.

In contrast to the long-standing locally controlled credentialing and access control apparatus that exists in the aviation environment, the credentialing/access control system in place in the maritime environment with the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) program is relatively new. Under the TWIC model, the federal government or its contractors are responsible for all aspects of the process, including worker enrollment, applicant vetting, credential issuance and associated functions of access control. In our view, the early results of TWIC have been uneven at best despite hundreds of millions of dollars in federal investments. The existing system in aviation operates at no cost to the federal government.

Increased Federal Role in Local Airport Security Functions Will Diminish Security

Some have suggested abandoning the successful local systems and processes already in place at airports with badging and access control to give TSA and the federal government full control over the entire process as is the case with TWIC in the maritime environment. Airport executives oppose any move to shift critical local functions in aviation to the federal government and believe that such a move would diminish security by eliminating a critical, extra layer of security that is already in place in airports and absent with the TWIC approach.

Pursuing such an approach would scuttle a successful local/federal model that has worked well for decades, eliminate local operational control, stymie significant efforts already under way at airports across the country to upgrade and biometrically enable existing airport badging and access control systems, and significantly increase costs to the aviation industry with no demonstrable security benefit.

With that in mind, AAAE is gratified that the MODERN Security Credentials Act introduced earlier this week by subcommittee leaders seeks to protect the existing, successful, locally controlled credentialing and access control apparatus while encouraging the Department of Homeland Security to consolidate, harmonize, and reduce redundancies within the vetting processes directly under federal control. This approach stands in marked contrast to efforts underway within DHS as part of the TSA Transportation Threat Assessment and Credentialing (TTAC) Infrastructure Modernization (TIM) program to harmonize aviation vetting programs with other, less mature transportation worker vetting programs that the department manages, namely TWIC and the hazmat endorsement for trucking.

One of the stated goals of TTAC's ongoing effort is to "harmonize and standardize its enrollment process across its security threat assessment programs, envisioning a centrally managed enrollment service, phasing in applicant populations over time." TTAC budget documents note different enrollment, vetting, and adjudication and redress processes between various transportation programs and state that TIM will "combine functions and processes into a single, uniform approach with common security requirements, methods, and information."

While the desire to centralize and federalize the process for all transportation worker vetting programs may be understandable from the department's perspective, airport executives are concerned about federal intrusion into existing processes that have worked well for decades. Airports are also very concerned about having to help foot the bill for the costly TIM effort – estimated at \$571 million through 2018 – for changes that provide them with no demonstrable security or operational benefit. The current system in aviation operates efficiently and effectively at a fraction of the cost of other transportation vetting programs and at no cost to the federal government. We want to ensure that remains the case.

With the federal government and state and local governments operating under historic budget constraints, it makes little sense to devote hundreds of millions of dollars in scarce resources to federalize functions that airports have performed successfully for nearly a decade. The TIM effort fails to take into account the long-proven approach that exists in the aviation industry.

Again, AAAE opposes such a centralized approach and is pleased that the MODERN Security Credentials Act seeks to clearly delineate between federal and local roles and responsibilities. By keeping DHS focused on improving its own vetting functions and limiting the expansion of the federal government's responsibilities in the aviation environment, we believe the legislation will help accelerate efforts to harmonize security processes within the federal government, limit unnecessary federal and industry expenditures, and protect a system that has served airports, the aviation industry, and the nation well for decades.

Mr. Chairman, AAAE sincerely appreciates the opportunity that you and your staff have afforded for input on this important legislation. We are particularly grateful for provisions that have been added prior to introduction to clarify that airport operators should maintain all roles and responsibilities they currently hold, including final decisions on badge issuance and access rights throughout their facilities. We look forward to continuing our work with you and with other members of the subcommittee as this measure moves through the legislative process.

Biometric Airport Security Identification Consortium (BASIC)

Before concluding, I want to take this opportunity to bring the subcommittee up to date on a related topic and the efforts of the Biometric Airport Security Identification Consortium or BASIC initiative, which I chair. In simple terms, the objective of BASIC is to define a comprehensive, airport-driven Concept of Operations that will enable voluntary migration to biometric-based badging and access control systems at airports – a goal that I know subcommittee members share. More than 40 airports of all sizes actively participate in BASIC. I would note that BASIC airport participants are working cooperatively with TSA on this initiative as well as with other groups, including the Airports Consultants Council.

Many airport operators – including the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey – are eager to move forward with biometrics, but concerns remain about the prospect of overly prescriptive

and costly solutions. Airports are also eager to avoid repeating mistakes made in the past where the federal government required costly and often proprietary access control systems to be deployed in airports in a short period of time. That approach proved both expensive and ineffective.

In an effort to avoid unnecessary regulations and a one-size-fits all mandate regarding biometric-based systems, airports participating in BASIC have identified several key principles that must be part of any future biometric-based badging and access control systems, including:

- Safeguards on local control and issuance of credentials,
- Leveraging of existing capital investments and resources,
- Standards-based open architecture and local determination of qualified vendors, and
- Phased implementation that migrates over time.

In addition to building on the processes and regulations already in place at airports today, BASIC is also working to adapt important federal standards regarding secure biometric credentials into the airport's operational environment. For example, Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) 201 and the more recent Personal Identity Verification Interoperability (PIV-I) for Non-Federal Issuers are reflected throughout the BASIC Concept of Operations and greatly inform the recommended phased implementation for airports.

The BASIC working group, which meets on a regular basis, is moving forward aggressively to develop a detailed Concept of Operations that will define the biometric components and common business processes that need to be added to airports' existing procedures to enable biometric-based badge and access control systems in a reasonable and cost-effective timeframe. In fact, several airports have already begun to implement the early phases of the BASIC Concept of Operations. Newark Liberty International Airport, San Francisco International Airport, Aspen Pitkin County International Airport, Los Angeles International and Salt Lake City International Airport – to name just a few – have implemented a secure messaging structure for the submission of biographic security threat assessments and biometric criminal history record checks that will ultimately enable the return of trusted biometrics back to the airport for use on credentials or in access control systems.

Airports are committed to moving forward to bring biometrics into the airport environment as soon as possible in a manner that builds upon existing capabilities and limits operational difficulties. The BASIC initiative, which is being driven by airports in cooperation with the federal government, offers the best opportunity for making the promises of biometrics a reality in a timely manner.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your recognition of the important role that airports play partnering with the federal government to enhance aviation security. Your efforts to preserve and protect the important role that airport operators play with regard to badging, credentialing, and access control at their facilities will help ensure that important efforts within the federal government to harmonize its own internal processes are not distracted by a costly and unnecessary attempt to federalize important local airport-controlled security functions, which provide countless benefits, including a vitally important additional layer of security.

I look forward to answering any questions you might have.