

Statement of the Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX)
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Transportation Security
Committee on Homeland Security
For Hearing on H.R. 1690: “The MODERN Security Credentials Act”
May 4, 2011

Before I begin my statement let me take a minute to first express my concern and condolences for the people in your home State of Alabama. Our thoughts and prayers are with them as they go through this period of recovery.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to welcome the witnesses today who are testifying on the “Modernizing of Documentation and Elimination of Redundant Identification and Security Credentials Act.”

The credentialing process for aviation and other transportation employees is one of the most critical layers of security that we have, as it determines who will have unescorted access to the most secure and sensitive areas at airports and seaports.

Industry experts agree that this type of employee screening is one of the most useful tools in mitigating the insider threat of individuals who wish to do harm.

With an issue as serious as this and a process as complicated as this, I am concerned that we are rushing legislative action for an issue that impacts many stakeholders, none of whom have asked for this type of legislation.

The subcommittee’s oversight in this area needs to continue before legislation is passed that could cost jobs and raise operating expenses for the economically sensitive transportation industry.

We have not had a hearing on the Transportation Worker Identification Credential program—the troubled biometric card program in use in the maritime environment. Yet, this bill would aim to “consolidate” and “harmonize” the security threat assessment processes of the TWIC and SIDA credentials.

TWIC has well-documented challenges, and the bill we are discussing today does nothing to address them. Instead, it would seem that this legislation is potentially seeking to overhaul a system that is not broken, and in the process, may place increased costs on the transportation sector when it is already struggling with record fuel prices.

Mr. Chairman, a TWIC card costs \$132.00. Would consolidating and harmonizing mean an airport’s SIDA credential, which currently costs \$29.00, will go up by \$100?

How will adding new aviation-related disqualifying offenses impact the employment of truckers and port workers? Will it have a disproportionate impact on minorities and small businesses? What assurances do we have that this legislation, if enacted, will not put people out of work—just when our unemployment picture is finally turning around?

I don’t think any of us knows the answers to these questions, which is why I think we should first do no harm and not pass a bill that could actually make us and our transportation system less safe.

I would like to continue working with you Mr. Chairman on this issue as we move forward in drafting a Transportation Security Authorization bill, which I think is the appropriate vehicle for major revisions to existing policies and practices.

This bill before us today goes way beyond eliminating redundant background checks and credentials for

transportation workers, which was the key component of the Safe Truckers Act which I support and which is contained in the second portion of this bill.

That language has been vetted with industry and government officials and should be the focus of what we are discussing today.

Accordingly, I would like to propose, on the record, that this subcommittee move the Safe Trucker Act alone.

Finally, let me express my concerns with the fact that the final version of this bill was never formally transmitted to me and the other Members of this panel.

Before moving on legislation that could dramatically impact the employment of millions of Americans, we have a responsibility to give thoughtful consideration to this legislation.

The failure to distribute the final text severely limits our ability to fully vet this bill.

I believe the American public wants us to focus on critical issues like mass transit security, passenger screening protocols for body scanners and pat downs, and raising international security standards, all of which I hope we address in an authorization bill for TSA.