

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Cedric L. Richmond (D-LA)

Subcommittee on Transportation Security

Hearing: “Utilizing Canine Teams to Detect Explosives and Mitigate Threats”

June 24, 2014

I would like to thank our panel of witnesses for being here today to give us valuable insight into TSA’s use of canines and the role they play in aviation security for both passenger and cargo screening, as well as how they can be used more effectively in both domains.

The Transportation Security Administration ensures the security of the traveling public using a multi-layered approach. Highly trained canine teams comprise a small part of this approach, but when used in an efficient and smart manner, they are an extremely effective tool within a larger toolbox that can thwart nefarious actors.

However, in January of 2013, GAO released a report that was critical of TSA’s handling of the rollout of its passenger screening canines. Specifically, the report stated that there was concern with the methodology that TSA implemented when deploying and testing the canine teams. In their prepared testimony for the hearing today, GAO noted that TSA is taking steps to analyze canine team data and to identify program trends. I am eager to hear about the progress TSA has made in this regard and also whether there is more that can be done by the agency to ensure that canine teams are being used in a thoughtful and efficient manner.

Ms. Harvey and Ms. Lontz, thank you for being here, and thank you for the role that you play in helping keep the traveling public secure. I read your prepared testimony and was particularly interested in the section about the use of Passenger Screening Canines in the Managed Inclusion process. You noted that these canine teams operate at more than 25 airports during peak travel times to help reduce waiting times.

I know that these airports also have explosive trace detection equipment in place to perform the same function.

I look forward to learning if there are efficiencies that can be achieved by using one method over another, or some combination of the two, as the cost for the technology, as well as the passenger screening canines, is great. I am also interested in the role that explosive detection canine teams play in the maritime environment. As you know, New Orleans has a great deal of passengers who travel to and from the city to other destinations aboard cruise ships.

I understand that most of the work performed in the maritime environment by canines is primarily in reference to ferries, but would be interested to know the role that canines play in the screening of passengers and cargo aboard cruise ships, such as during VIPR operations.

Mr. Connell, thank you for appearing before the subcommittee today. I know that there is significant interest from the cargo screening industry in having privatized canines screen cargo as a means of having another platform available to detect threats. I look forward to hearing about the screening methods that are already in place, as well as how the use of privatized canines would effect your operations and what savings might stem from their use.

I am also interested in the respondents to the survey you referenced in your prepared testimony who indicated that they would not consider using dogs provided by private companies, and why they would not use them. Once again, thank you all for being here today, and I look forward to a healthy dialogue on this topic.