



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Subcommittee Hearing Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) *On the Frontlines in Turbulent Times: Workforce Perspectives on the State of Transportation Security*

November 16, 2021

As we prepare for the holidays and the busy travel season ahead, we must ensure that our transportation security infrastructure is capable of handling the challenges we face. With travel volume increasing at U.S. airports and transit sites around the country, we have seen a rise in incidents involving unruly passengers and assaults against transportation workers. Further complicating matters are TSA staffing issues and the lack of enforcement of penalties imposed on those who disregard the law, like the federal mask mandate.

This year alone, the Federal Aviation Administration has reported over 5,100 unruly passenger incidents, of which over 3,700 are mask related. These numbers do not account for the overwhelming number of incidents happening at ground transit sites around the country. Last month, Subcommittee Chairwoman Watson Coleman and I wrote to TSA Administrator David Pekoske to encourage TSA to increase the penalties it imposes on offenders and publicize its efforts. Robust enforcement is key to deterring this unacceptable behavior.

I am a firm believer that having a strong transportation workforce is an essential component to having a strong national security infrastructure. These essential workers are not only facing attacks from unruly passengers, but the daily risk of being infected by the COVID-19 virus while performing their duties. To date, over 11,000 TSA employees have tested positive for COVID-19, and tragically at least 32 have died. Yet, longstanding issues like the lack of fair pay continue to plague the agency's workforce with travel volume steadily rising.

The Biden Administration has shown encouraging signs of support for workers' rights; however, we still have a way to go in terms of providing these rights and improving working conditions. TSA continues to rank at or near the bottom in the annual "Best Places to Work" survey, with low morale contributing to high turnover at the agency. If TSA cannot hire and retain the highly skilled, dedicated workforce it needs, it will struggle to keep up with increasing passenger volume and, ultimately, place our transportation systems at risk.

All these factors make this hearing timely. I am especially eager to hear from our witnesses who have a unique perspective and insight into these issues and others impacting transportation workers. I would like to thank our frontline workers and their families for their dedication and sacrifice during these times.

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