

Statement of Ranking Member Bonnie Watson Coleman

Subcommittee on Transportation and Protective Security Field Hearing

“Securing Public Areas of Transportation Systems: Stakeholder Perspectives”

Trenton, New Jersey

Tuesday, November 28, 2017, at 10:00 a.m.

The 12th Congressional District of New Jersey, in which we sit today, is connected by a complex web of transit systems. Every day, thousands of passengers pass through my district on NJ Transit, SEPTA, and Amtrak trains.

The safe and secure operation of transit systems is essential to the social and economic wellbeing of the people I serve. Their ability to travel safely depends upon the security efforts of today’s panelists, who face a daunting task.

Terrorists have targeted soft targets such as subways, mass transit stations, and public airport areas in the United States and abroad. Last year, just up the road in Elizabethtown, five pipe bombs were found near a transit station, and one exploded as police were attempting to disarm it. Thankfully, there were no injuries, but the need to protect against threats to these systems is clear.

The emergence of a class of would-be terrorists who, with little to no training, financial support, or direction carry out “crimes of opportunity” against innocent people demands greater vigilance and collaboration at all levels of government.

Securing these critical transportation systems requires a layered, risk-based, well-resourced approach. Unfortunately, the budget that President Trump proposed for Fiscal Year 2018 goes in the opposite direction and calls for draconian cuts to almost every relevant Federal program.

Last year, the President of the American Public Transit Association testified before a Senate Subcommittee that transit agencies across the United States had identified \$6 billion in capital and operational security needs.

Yet, President Trump wants to cut the Transit Security Grant Program—the primary source of Federal security funds for most transit agencies—from \$88 million to just \$48 million. He also is proposing significant cuts to TSA’s Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) program.

Under this program, TSA officers, Federal Air Marshals, and canine teams to partner with transit police and other local law enforcement to carry out security operations within surface transportation systems and public airport areas.

Under President Trump’s budget, the number of VIPR teams would drop from 31 teams to just 8. Finally, President Trump is proposing a complete elimination of the Law Enforcement Officer Reimbursement Program.

Under this critical program, local law enforcement agencies receive partial Federal reimbursement for deploying officers at airports. In 2017, the program was funded at \$44 million.

The cuts that President Trump is seeking would come at the cost of the security of transportation systems in the 12th Congressional District and across the country.

Later today, when we return to Washington, I will be introducing a bill to push back against these reckless cuts. My legislation, the *Surface Transportation and Public Area Security Act of 2017*, seeks to not only restore, revamp, and resource important programs aimed at securing critical soft targets, but also greatly enhance Federal partnership with State and local stakeholders to protect these vital systems and the people who use them.

In addition to authorizing \$400 million for the Transit Security Grant Program, directing TSA to maintain 60 VIPR teams, and restoring funding for the Law Enforcement Officer Reimbursement Program, my bill would:

- Make law enforcement reimbursement available for surface transportation;
- Increase the deployment of explosive detection canines to surface transportation;
- Require a review of whether it is appropriate for people to be able to carry guns into public transportation areas; and
- Direct the dissemination of best practices for securing against vehicle-based attacks, such as the attack we witnessed recently in New York.

A bill focused on securing these aspects of our transportation systems is long past due. Today's hearing is a great opportunity to start a meaningful conversation about how we can work together to make these systems more secure.