



**One Hundred Seventeenth Congress
Committee on Homeland Security
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

April 27, 2022

The Honorable David Pekoske
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
6595 Springfield Center Dr.
Springfield, VA 22150

Dear Administrator Pekoske:

We write to you regarding the dangerous, persistent trend our country faces of individuals bringing guns to airport checkpoints. The latest high-profile example involves Congressman Madison Cawthorn (NC-11), who reportedly brought a loaded 9mm handgun to a checkpoint at Charlotte Douglas International Airport yesterday morning.¹ Alarming, this is not the first time that Rep. Cawthorn has displayed such disregard for aviation security; he was also caught carrying a loaded handgun through a checkpoint at Asheville Regional Airport in February of last year.² Two incidents in such a short period of time should raise our collective alarm regarding repeat offenses involving a firearm. Accordingly, we urge the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to act decisively to ensure repeat offenders like Rep. Cawthorn face the full extent of TSA's enforcement actions.

This Committee has long voiced concerns about the threats posed by firearms at TSA checkpoints and in airport public areas. On February 15, 2022, the Subcommittee on Transportation and Maritime Security held a hearing regarding the disturbing rise in guns found at airport checkpoints in recent years. The Subcommittee heard testimony from airport management, labor, and law enforcement communities on these encounters—which have doubled on a per passenger basis since 2019, soaring to the unprecedented level of nearly 6,000 firearms found at checkpoints in 2021.³ Troublingly, 86-percent of firearms found in 2021 were loaded.⁴ As the witnesses testified, each encounter with a firearm disrupts TSA's screening operations, draws resources from other security functions throughout the airport, and threatens the safety of passengers and workers, as

¹ Neil Vidgor. "Madison Cawthorn Again Brought a Loaded Gun to the Airport, Officials Say." *New York Times* (Apr. 26, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/26/us/politics/madison-cawthorn-gun-airport.html>.

² *Id.*

³ "TSA detected an increase in guns at airport checkpoints in the Baltimore/Washington region in 2021," Transportation Security Administration Press Release (Jan. 18, 2022), <https://www.tsa.gov/news/press/releases/2022/01/18/tsa-detected-increase-guns-airport-checkpoints-baltimorewashington>.

⁴ *Id.*

was brought into sharp focus when a passenger accidentally discharged a firearm at a crowded checkpoint in Atlanta in November 2021.⁵

After hearing these stakeholders' serious concerns, the Committee considered H.R. 6856, the *Securing Air Travel Act*, on March 2. As you know, the measure was drafted in close collaboration with TSA and stakeholders and is aimed at increasing firearms-related signage in terminals, directing TSA to carry out a campaign to increase public awareness of firearms restrictions, suspending trusted traveler eligibility for offenders, and, notably, establishing minimum civil penalties for repeat and egregious violations. The bipartisan support in the hearing and for the legislation indicates that Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle agree that those who break the law and endanger the safety of other passengers—and especially repeat offenders such as Rep. Cawthorn—must be held to account.

We are committed to continuing to work with you to address the challenges firearms pose to TSA's operations. Additionally, we wish to ensure TSA takes appropriate enforcement action against repeat offenders who place their fellow travelers at risk on multiple occasions. TSA must pursue appropriate action without fear or favor against all such offenders, regardless of whether they are public figures such as Rep. Cawthorn. Accordingly, we request that TSA answer the following questions:

1. How is TSA responding to the alarming rise in firearms found at checkpoints? Please provide an update on the status of TSA's efforts to address this challenge.
2. How many firearms has TSA found at checkpoints so far in 2022, and what percent of those firearms were loaded?
3. How many individuals who presented a loaded or unloaded firearm at a checkpoint in the last five years were repeat offenders? What penalties do repeat offenders currently face?
4. In the past year, how many passengers have been caught carrying a firearm at Charlotte Douglas International Airport?
 - a. What regulatory actions, if any, did TSA pursue against these passengers? This information may be provided to the Committee in anonymized form.
 - b. Is TSA aware of any criminal investigations or prosecutions pursued against these other passengers by Federal or local authorities? This information may be provided to the Committee in anonymized form.
5. What regulatory actions will TSA pursue related to Congressman Cawthorn's second attempt to carry a loaded firearm through a checkpoint? Has TSA yet sought to impose any fines or civil penalties against Congressman Cawthorn? Has TSA suspended Congressman Cawthorn's ability to receive benefits through TSA PreCheck or any other

⁵ Sean Keenan, et al. "Discharge of Felon's Gun Prompts Panic at Atlanta Airport." *New York Times* (Nov. 20, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/20/us/atlanta-airport-gun.html>.

trusted traveler program? If so, when did this occur and for how long will the suspension last?

6. Please outline the specific actions taken by TSA (and, to the extent TSA is aware, local law enforcement) following the detection of the firearm in Congressman Cawthorn's carry-on.
 - a. Were there any discrepancies, substantively or procedurally, in TSA's response to the incident involving Congressman Cawthorn as compared to its response to factually similar incidents involving other passengers?

As a reminder, the Privacy Act is not a basis for withholding information responsive to this request. Under the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. §552a(b)(9), restrictions on the release by agencies of records containing personally identifiable information do not apply to disclosures "to either House of Congress, or, to the extent of matter within its jurisdiction, any committee or subcommittee thereof, any joint committee of Congress or subcommittee of any such joint committee."

Thank you in advance for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chairman



BONNIE WATSON COLEMAN
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Transportation and
Maritime Security