



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

April 19, 2016

The Honorable Peter Neffenger  
Administrator  
Transportation Security Administration  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
601 12<sup>th</sup> Street South  
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Administrator Neffenger:

I am writing to express the serious concerns I have regarding staffing issues at airports throughout our nation. One recurring complaint I hear from airport officials is current staffing allocation models do not adequately correspond with the airport's needs.

According to a recent press release from the Transportation Security Administration, many airports around the nation are experiencing substantial growth in checkpoint volume. During peak times passengers are experiencing significant delays. Certain airports have the capacity to operate multiple lanes within security checkpoint areas; however, staffing shortages often leave the lanes unused, and as a result, the queue grows and wait times increase. I am concerned the inability to take advantage of airports' infrastructure may create an additional vulnerability by not having individuals screened in unused lanes due to staffing shortages.

Understanding we are working in a time where budgets are constrained, I realize additional funds will be needed to provide more staffing at airports. However, I believe a thorough look must be taken at the current staffing allocation model and standard operating procedures to ascertain if any room exists where efficiencies can be achieved.

One possibility for flexibility and efficiencies could be achieved through the Screening of Passengers by Observation Techniques (SPOT) program. In May 2010, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) issued a report on TSA's efforts to validate this program.<sup>1</sup> GAO analyzed (1) the extent to which TSA validated the SPOT program before wide-scale deployment, (2) implementation challenges, and (3) the extent to which TSA measures SPOT's effect on aviation security. GAO found TSA deployed SPOT nationwide without first validating the scientific basis for identifying suspicious passengers in an airport environment; TSA was experiencing implementation challenges, including not fully utilizing the resources it has available to systematically collect and analyze information obtained by Behavior Detection Officers (BDO) on passengers who may pose a threat to the aviation system; and the agency lacked outcome-oriented measures to evaluate the program's progress toward reaching its goals.

In November 2013, the Government Accountability Office made public a report recommending TSA limit future funding for TSA's SPOT program and suggested Congress consider the lack of scientific validation for the program when providing funding for the agency.<sup>2</sup> To my knowledge, TSA has not scientifically validated the usage of BDOs. Given these facts, I believe you should strongly consider the possibility of reallocating these individuals to perform other screening functions within the staffing allocation model.

I look forward to working with you to identify and address this important issue. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Hope Goins, Chief Counsel for Oversight, at 202-226-2616.

Thank you,



Bennie G. Thompson

Ranking Member

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<sup>1</sup> GAO-10-763: Aviation Security – Efforts to Validate TSA's Passenger Screening Behavior Detection Program Underway, but Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Validation and Address Operational Challenges.

<sup>2</sup> GAO-14-159: Aviation Security: TSA Should Limit Future Funding for Behavior Detection Activities