



COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Hearing Statement of Transportation & Maritime Security Subcommittee Chairwoman Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ)

On the Frontlines in Turbulent Times: Workforce Perspectives on the State of Transportation Security

November 16, 2021

The safety of frontline workers and passengers is paramount, particularly as we continue to battle a pandemic that has turned many of our usual travel customs and norms on their head. While this is not the first year that our country will celebrate the holidays with COVID-19 in our midst, it is heartening that almost 60% of the population is fully vaccinated against the virus. While we still have a ways to go, strong protection from the worst effects of the virus means more families can safely reunite during this special time of year.

Last Monday was the deadline for federal employees, including Transportation Security Officers (TSOs), to receive their last shot of a two-dose vaccine regimen – or single dose in the case of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine – to meet the November 22nd deadline to be fully vaccinated, per President Biden’s recent executive order. In addition, many major airlines have required their employees to receive their shots ahead of the January 4th deadline for federal contractors. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about how vaccination efforts are progressing among their memberships, and the partnerships between employees and employers that these efforts have borne.

In addition to COVID-19, there is another scourge that continues to plague air travel: unruly passengers. This topic is not new to this subcommittee. In July, we discussed how this bad behavior is affecting TSOs and other frontline workers who are simply doing their jobs to keep the traveling public safe. And yet, the number of these incidents continues to climb. Far too many are related to passengers who refuse to abide by the Federal requirement to wear masks in transportation settings, a requirement that is critical to reducing viral transmission and getting this pandemic under control.

Last month, I joined the chairman of the full committee, Chairman Thompson, in writing to TSA to urge the agency to pursue civil penalties for offenders more aggressively following reports that TSA had only issued fines against 10 people. Recent news reports tell us that TSA has now assessed \$85,990 in fines against 190 individuals. While this is an improvement, the consequences of assaulting TSOs, flight attendants, or ground-based workers should be made explicitly clear and violators must be held accountable without exception. There are many other challenges facing our frontline workers that are ripe for discussion today, as well as proposed solutions that I hope will present common ground for members of this subcommittee.

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