



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Statement of Ranking Member Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS)  
*Examining the President's FY 2019 Budget Request for the  
Transportation Security Administration***

**Subcommittee on Transportation & Protective Security**

**April 12, 2018**

Effectively executing TSA's mission to secure the nation's transportation systems is essential to homeland security.

Even though the threat environment is constantly evolving, the Trump Administration's budget request for Fiscal Year 2019 is woefully inadequate to the point of undermining TSA's ability to carry out its mission on behalf of the American people.

First, it fails to build efforts to address morale challenges within TSA's frontline security workforce. While a slight improvement upon last year, TSA still ranks 336 out of 339 agency subcomponents in best places to work.

I think we can both agree that TSA must do better.

Unlike employees at most Federal agencies, TSA officers do not receive regularly scheduled salary increases, though, Mr. Administrator, you have the authority to grant such increases.

Year after year, TSA has failed to prioritize requesting significant funding for salary increases or longevity pay, leading to unacceptable attrition rates.

I was greatly disappointed to see that the Administration's request does not significantly raise pay for the hard-working men and women of TSA.

To make matters worse, TSOs are still denied the same rights that FAA and other Federal employees are granted, and still lack access to a fair disciplinary appeals process.

I was also troubled to see that this Administration is seeking to eliminate the VIPR program. This program is arguably TSA's most visible and mobile resource for surface transportation security.

Its elimination would worsen the effects of drastic cuts to the Transit Security Grant

Program envisioned in President Trump's budget proposal.

We simply must provide more resources to secure surface transportation given recent attacks and current threats.

This budget also eliminates the Law Enforcement Officer (LEO) Reimbursement program, which supports placing uniformed officers near screening checkpoints in over 300 airports, and it shirks TSA's responsibility to protect exit lanes.

With little to no consultation, the Administration's proposal seeks to shift this burden onto local jurisdictions and airports that are not likely to have resources necessary to maintain a law enforcement presence in public areas of transportation systems.

I was, however, pleased to see that the recently passed omnibus for the remainder of fiscal year 2018 included funding to maintain 31 VIPR teams and the LEO reimbursement program, and to support exit lane screening.

The funding of these essential transportation security programs in the omnibus go even further to show how unrealistic this proposed budget is.

Given the steady increase in threats against our transportation systems, the Administration should be bolstering Federal support for such programs, not eliminating them.

Instead, President Trump wants to increase the diversion of a large segment of fees collected for aviation security to his proposed \$18 billion border wall slush fund.

On an annual basis, over a billion dollars is diverted from TSA security operations to the General Fund.

I know that you are aware this has been a longstanding concern, not only for me but for many of my colleagues in Congress.

These fees need to be spent how the American people expect them to be spent—to secure transportation systems.

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Media contact: Adam Comis at (202) 225-9978

