

DIANE BLACK  
6<sup>TH</sup> DISTRICT OF TENNESSEE

COMMITTEE ON  
WAYS AND MEANS

SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH

COMMITTEE ON THE BUDGET



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

June 1, 2016

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Peter V. Neffenger  
Administrator  
Transportation Security Administration  
601 12<sup>th</sup> Street S,  
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Administrator Neffenger:

I write today to request information from the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) regarding the longer than normal security wait times at airports across the country. Recent reports of delays up to 90 minutes are concerning for several reasons, however, this letter seeks to obtain information regarding the lack of use of the TSA's Screening Partnership Program (SPP).

According to the TSA, the SPP contracts security screening services at commercial airports to qualified private companies. These companies run screening operations under federal oversight and must comply with all TSA security screening procedures.<sup>1</sup> However, as of today, only 22 of the 450 commercial airports use private screeners.

Further, in November 2015 the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO) examined the TSA's use of SPP at airports and recommended the TSA revise its 2013 cost estimating methodology to conform to best practices. . . and compare and update estimates when major changes to contract values occur.<sup>2</sup> These findings demonstrate that TSA can do more to better estimate the costs associated with SPP contracts and our concern is the sincerity of TSA to change its methodology in estimating costs to "not limit its selection of contractors."<sup>3</sup>

The above mentioned shortcomings should also bring to question the reported high turnover within the TSA.<sup>4</sup> For years now the TSA has suffered a high rate of turnover and a lack of diligent efforts to recruit top employees. Therefore, due to these inefficiencies and recommendations from the GAO, I ask the TSA to provide a response to the addendum attached to this letter.

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<sup>1</sup> Screening Partnership Program, Transportation Security Administration, (<https://www.tsa.gov/for-industry/screening-partnerships>).

<sup>2</sup> TSA Can Benefit from Improved Cost Estimates, Screening Partnership Program, GAO Highlights, <http://gao.gov/assets/680/673660.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> TSA, an 'abominable failure', Politico, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/06/tsa-airport-security-failure-jeh-johnson-118557>.

My goal is to work with the TSA to remove any barriers and encourage the Administration to improve cooperation with the most qualified private companies to screen our nation's airports. I look forward to working with you and the Administration to resolve these service problems and improve private partnership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Diane Black". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D".

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DIANE BLACK

Member of Congress

### **Definitions**

- 1) Any – means more than one.
- 2) Commercial airport(s) – means any airport within the United States.
- 3) Private Screening Contractor(s) – means any security screening service as understood within the Screening Partnership Program.
- 4) Private Contractor(s) – means any security screening service as understood within the Screening Partnership Program.
- 5) Policies and Procedures – means any formal or informal statement of intent, principle(s), standard(s), or set of guideline(s) that provide for addressing a matter within the jurisdiction of the TSA. This can also mean any discussions held internally to discuss the relevant matter.
- 6) Wait times – means the time patrons wait to be screened by the TSA at airports.

### **Questions for Administrator Neffenger**

- 1) Why have only 22 of the approximately 450 commercial airports been awarded private contracts under the Screening Partnership Program?
- 2) How many companies have applied for a contract under the Screening Partnership Program?
- 3) How many commercial airports have submitted an application to the local airport federal security director for the Screening Partnership Program?
- 4) How does the TSA pair airports with private screening contractors under the SPP?
- 5) Has the TSA considered the GAO's findings in November of 2015 and what changes are being implemented to see their recommendations made in order?
- 6) What has been the turnover rate amongst TSA employees in the past 5 years?
- 7) How many TSA personnel have left in the past 3 years?
- 8) What has been the retention rate of private contractors operating under the SPP?
- 9) Are there any plans to improve the SPP program due to the recent wait times?
- 10) What policies and procedures are in place to address the longer wait times?