

ASSOCIATION OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS–CWA, AFL-CIO



TESTIMONY OF

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INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT**

BEFORE

**THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION OF THE U.S.
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE**

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Thank you, Chairman Petri, Ranking Member Costello and members of the Aviation Subcommittee for inviting me to participate in today's hearing on "How Best to Improve our Nation's Airport Passenger Security System Through Common Sense Solutions." My name is Veda Shook and I am the International President of the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA (AFA). AFA represents 60,000 Flight Attendants at 21 airlines throughout the United States and is the world's largest Flight Attendant union. I am here to say the skies are safer today than they were before 9/11. For much of this thanks is due to the federalized TSA workforce and the thorough security screening of airline passengers, crew, and airport employees.

As a Flight Attendant, I bring a unique perspective to airport security screening. Our nation's Flight Attendants are required to pass through security checkpoints every time we go to work, sometimes entering security checkpoints multiple times a day at different locations around the country and even around the world.

Federalizing airport screening has improved the security of air travel, making Flight Attendant jobs and passenger travel safer today. Simply, federalizing airport screeners has been a resounding success. While we are the last line of defense in aviation security, my Flight Attendant colleagues and I depend on TSA workers to keep our jobs safe. We depend upon the integrity of each layer of security in the airport as well as on the aircraft and must respond when all other screening methods fail. We depend upon a regulated security system that meets the requirements of *The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 (9/11 Commission Act)*, [Pub. L. 110-53](#).

Prior to TSA, passenger and baggage screening was conducted by private screening companies under contract to airlines, which created a myriad of screening experiences, to put it mildly. We could never be certain if our shoes, hairclip, belt or jewelry would trigger the metal detector or not. Would the airport screener want to search our bags, or would we speed through the checkpoint? I personally recall one specific incident where I was following a passenger through security. I noticed that he had a rather large knife on his belt that didn't alarm through security. I mentioned to him that I was surprised the

detector didn't go off and that the screeners didn't notice the 4 inch blade on his hip. He chuckled and pulled out two additional small knives in one pocket and another pocket full of change. "Happens a lot", he noted. Today, it never happens. We can thank our Federal Transportation Security Officers and the TSA for its diligence and uniformity at security checkpoints.

After Congress created the TSA and the government assumed responsibility for security screening, conditions quickly improved. A federalized workforce creates consistency, and thus greater security, throughout our nation's airports as a key component of a multi-layered aviation security system. When the traveling public or our members encounter discrepancies or problems, a federalized workforce allows for efficient resolution through a central organization versus trying to determine which screening company works in which airport and then searching for the relevant authority.

A federal screening workforce also ensures that the TSA can quickly communicate and adapt to emerging threats with greater ability to transfer personnel from one location to another in times of emergency or crisis. The fact is that our airports and airplanes are much safer today given TSA's access to intelligence data; which drives real-time security based risk assessments. This is an important tool unavailable to private screening companies that would compromise the safety and security of passengers and crew.

Appreciating the success of TSA, AFA is concerned about the growing drumbeat for a return to the old system where security checkpoints were contracted out to the lowest bidder. Given today's aviation security concerns, we believe that a return to a bottom-line driven system that puts security second to profits would be a reckless and unjustified regression from TSA's successful mission to protect the skies.

I commend the TSA and Administrator Pistole's efforts to limit privatization of security at additional airports. AFA opposes efforts to expand Security Screening Partnership (SPP) programs beyond the handful of current locations – a return to the outdated model of the pre-9/11 era in which each airport's security screening is different. We remember

all too well inconsistent security policies, passenger confusion, and frequent language barriers of pre-9/11 screening and strongly believe it would be a mistake to return to private screeners.

The passenger experience and the free flow of commerce has also greatly improved from several TSA initiatives over the past several years, including risk-based screening, PreCheck, other trial programs, and Known Crewmember. These programs not only ensure the safety and security of passengers, but do so in a less burdensome fashion that encourages more people to fly. TSA's risk-based screening for frequent and trusted travelers, U.S. service members, children and the elderly has not only created time-saving efficiencies, it allows for greater scrutiny when necessary. Flight Attendants understand the need for and support this layered approach to passenger screening and the expansion of screening alternatives for the most trusted travelers. This is not a belief based on subjective feelings, but rather a careful assessment based on science and data.

TSA's initiatives have been enormously successful. Over four million passengers have been pre-screened and qualify for TSA PreCheck™, an intelligence-driven, risk-based approach to security screening. PreCheck began with only two airlines at four locations. By the end of the year, PreCheck will have been expanded to 35 airport locations with more than five million registered users.

Other risk-based screening has been implemented for travelers under 12 and over 75. According to the TSA, children under 12 make up 3.5% (approximately 60,000) daily of daily screening experiences and senior travelers, over 75, make up 2.4 % (approximately 41,000). It just makes sense to have tailored screening for passengers who fall into a low-risk category to undergo screening appropriate to their traveling profile. Some airports are also adding family-friendly lanes making the screening process less intimidating for families and seniors.

AFA is also supportive of trial programs at five locations that permit members of the armed services to utilize PreCheck security screening lanes. The TSA, in partnership with

the Department of Defense (DOD), is testing a program that permits service members with Common Access Cards (CAC) to utilize the PreCheck lanes. The program is currently available at five airports and a sixth will be added soon.

AFA calls for 100 percent screening of all individuals who have access to our airplanes. By applying the appropriate screening levels to low-risk travelers, the experience of all travelers will improve.

The Air Line Pilots Association (ALPA), our counterpart union in the cockpit at many of our carriers, and Airlines for America (A4A) were leaders in the development of the Known Crewmember Program (KCM). ALPA members participated in the initial test phase, which included a limited number of crewmembers in a handful of airports. The test phase successfully demonstrated that an alternative screening program for crewmembers would work and that the program could be expanded to include all crewmembers at significantly more airports. Since its inception and test phase in 2008, the TSA has conducted over 2.3 million KCM screenings.

The Known Crewmember Program is yet another example of a successfully implemented TSA program that is cost effective and creates shorter lines, thus improving the passenger experience. After the successful completion of the KCM test phase, TSA announced, on July 23, 2012, that Flight Attendants would be admitted to the Known Crewmember Program. On October 1, 2012 the first Flight Attendant, a member of AFA, utilized KCM. Today, Flight Attendants at all types of carriers – legacy, regional and niche – are participating in KCM. As a current Flight Attendant at Alaska Airlines, I have been able to utilize KCM at several airports and I am happy to report that the screening is considered by everyone involved to be a huge success.

In addition to completing the screening process in a fraction of the time it used to take, Flight Attendants – like our pilot colleagues – also undergo a comprehensive ten year background check and an annual FAA recertification.

To be clear: KCM, like the other risk-based screening methods, is not a security bypass. KCM utilizes real-time security clearance information to process aviation crewmembers. KCM recognizes the trusted status of Flight Attendants as first responders and the last line of defense, allowing Flight Attendants to report to work with greater ease. Flight Attendants are working more hours than ever before and thousands of my colleagues commute to work by plane. Our lives will be improved by time not spent in a traditional security checkpoint each and every time we pass through a KCM airport.

AFA continues to work with our airlines to press for Flight Attendant population into KCM databases in a timely fashion. We urge every airline that has not yet committed to participation of all of its crewmembers in KCM to do so in order to better assist the TSA in its ability to focus its resources on screening unknown passengers. We expect a majority of the nation's flight crewmembers to be participating in KCM by the end of the year. There are currently 28 airports supporting KCM screening. These KCM airports screen over 100,000 crewmembers

The inclusion of Flight Attendants in KCM eliminates uncomfortable situations where, in order to get to the plane on time, we have to cut to the front of the security line. This will not only benefit our passengers, it will also allow the TSA to provide better service. The program is very good news for everyone.

Nevertheless, more can be done to improve the passenger experience while maintaining safety. For the past several years, AFA has called for the adoption of reasonable uniform standards regulating carry-on baggage. Today, again, AFA also calls upon Congress, the TSA, the FAA and industry to establish standards for carry-on baggage permitted to pass through security checkpoints. Passengers are already familiar with the TSA 3-1-1 program for liquids, aerosols and gels. That is, three ounces in a one-quart clear plastic, zip-top bag. We call upon the TSA to add two numbers to this equation 1+1: One bag, plus one personal item. These bags should then fit through a template on the X-ray

conveyor belt.¹ Creating a uniform national standard for carry-on baggage would reduce passenger confusion, streamline and improve the security of the screening process, and enable Flight Attendants to more efficiently board aircraft.

Moreover, reducing the size and number of carry-on bags security screening would ultimately be enhanced at security checkpoints. With all of our work with the TSA, and with my own extensive traveling experience, I can say with certainty that there are more bags per person and larger bags per person, and that has absolutely had an operational impact at the security checkpoint. By reducing the quantity of carry-on bags, it is estimated that savings of hundreds of millions of dollars could be provided.

Current FAA guidelines for carry-on bags were established more than two decades ago when air travel was much different from today. Air carriers have an individual program to manage the weight, size and number of carry-on bags. This creates a maze of varying programs making it difficult and confusing for passengers. With the formation of global alliances and code share agreements, individual program philosophies add to the confusion since alliance members sell seats on their partners' routes. A ticket purchased from one carrier may be subject to the carry-on bag rules of another.

Limiting the size, type and amount of carry-on baggage, and strictly enforcing such limits, in relation to improving security is not a new concept: it was recommended by the FAA Aviation Security Advisory Committee in 1996. Similarly, after 9/11 the FAA issued guidance to carriers to limit passengers to one carry-on bag and one personal bag (such as a purse or briefcase). This restriction is loosely enforced.

AFA has filed two petitions for rulemaking requesting the FAA to enhance their carry-on baggage rule, citing incidents involving carry-on bags that range from disruption in the cabin, delays in boarding and deplaning, physical and verbal abuse of Flight Attendants and passengers, and injuries and impediments to speedy evacuations. Despite these two

¹ Exclusions: any regulations established by the FAA or the TSA should not apply to child safety seat nor a child passenger, assistive devices for disabled passengers, musical instruments, outer garments or to working crewmembers in uniform.

requests for rulemaking, the FAA has failed to establish a specific requirement regarding size and number of carry-on bags allowed.

According to federal security guidance, Flight Attendants are charged with observing passengers during the boarding process to identify anything suspicious. Prior to takeoff, Flight Attendants can ask the captain to subject a suspicious passenger to additional security scrutiny. The ability of Flight Attendants to provide this critical and final layer of pre-flight security is severely hampered by the distraction created with carry-on baggage chaos. Frequent flyers see it almost every flight: Flight Attendants are forced to manage excessive numbers of oversized carry-on bags in limited overhead bin space and must remove baggage that doesn't fit from the cabin.

Limiting the size and number of carry-on baggage would create a uniform, enforceable rule across the industry, and enhance security in the process. It will allow for more efficient screening at the checkpoint and also improve the ability of Flight Attendants to more effectively observe passengers for possible security threats. The TSA could make travel more secure and convenient for passengers by issuing a standardized policy on carry-on bags and limiting the size and number of carry-on bags screened at an airport checkpoint.

In conclusion, the passenger experience is better today under the Transportation Security Administration than it was before 9/11. Today, passengers are safer, screenings are becoming more efficient, and as a result, more people are encouraged to fly. Protecting our skies is a difficult job with massive responsibility, but a job that the TSA, as a key partner in the fabric of our nation's aviation security, is well equipped to handle.