Written Testimony
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Senate Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety and Security
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"TSA Modernization: Improvements to Aviation Security"

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Subcommittee, on behalf of the eight members of the Security Manufacturers Coalition (SMC), thank you for the opportunity to share our collective industry priorities and key recommendations for modernizing and improving aviation security.

The SMC is the unified voice of leading security technology companies with manufacturing operations and offices in ten states. The SMC generates 7000 direct and 20,000 indirect jobs in everything from research and development to engineering and advanced product manufacturing. The companies have certified equipment deployed around the world.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) have been diligently working to make long-term improvements to aviation security at the checkpoint and beyond. The SMC and its member companies share the government's concern about new and evolving threats, and remain committed to delivering first-rate threat detection and screening equipment to improve security for the traveling public.

My testimony today will focus on shared industry priorities and recommendations for TSA modernization that will enable TSA to remain prepared and stay ahead of its adversaries to deter, detect, and disrupt any threat to aviation while also being able to meet the growing demands of air travelers.

Funding to meet current future needs:

The SMC recognizes that Congress must deal with substantial funding constraints and demands on its limited resources in an attempt to meet the needs of competing stakeholders. When considering aviation security, the lack of adequate funding and ever-changing priorities impedes long-term innovation at a time when threats against the system continue to evolve and present potential adverse effects on international travel and commerce. To that end, TSA must embark on a focused, requirements-driven, multi-year program that will immediately accelerate the development, testing, and deployment of next generation technology as well as the initiation of system upgrades for all checkpoint and checked baggage technology with new software and detection algorithms. Making long-term technology investments takes planning and significant resources. In the short-term, the SMC recommends ending the diversion of a portion of the Passenger Security Fee that is now dedicated for deficit reduction to pay for checkpoint development and deployment of new technology enhancements. Longer term, we support a

multi-year approach that includes a checkpoint equipment capital fund, similar to the checked baggage program, to provide consistent availability of resources for technology acquisitions.

Authorize and Fully Fund the Innovation Task Force

The SMC strongly supports the work and the efforts of the Innovation Task Force (ITF). Since it was formally unveiled in 2016, the ITF has engaged with industry stakeholders to identify and demonstrate next generation technology solutions to improve both security and operational efficiency at selected airports. In order to build upon recent successes and to clearly establish a process for developing a program of record for approved technologies, Congress should formally authorize and fund the work of the ITF. Congress should direct the TSA to establish a framework and a formal requirements process that serves as a roadmap for industry engagement and to further encourage industry collaboration and participation. At the same time, Congress should direct TSA to provide annual updates on the effectiveness of the ITF in improving the overall security equipment development and acquisitions process.

Enacting Acquisition Reform and Improving the Test & Evaluation Process

The passage of the Transportation Security Reform Act (TSARA—P.L. 113-245) was an important legislative achievement and a key milestone for security technology manufacturers. For the first time, TSA was required to develop a five-year technology acquisition plan and share its contents with industry. This document provides a valuable framework for industry resource planning. However, industry needs more information and more direction from TSA to ensure that future manufacturing as well as research and development investment plans are truly aligned with technology capability gaps and actual government acquisition needs.

For technology manufacturers, the path to technology acquisition is a long one. It takes an average of three to five years, and sometimes up to ten, for new technology capabilities to navigate the test and evaluation process before being deployed at airports. Congress must direct DHS and TSA to develop a plan to completely reconstitute the equipment test and evaluation process with a target goal of reducing the timeframe to no more than one year from the date of laboratory certification. This should start with a formal review of the test and evaluation process conducted to establish a new and more streamlined process. The SMC recommends additional resources be dedicated to hiring additional testing experts to manage the transition to the next generation of equipment. Additional efficiencies can also be realized by establishing a formal third party test and evaluation process, and requiring TSA to accept the results at the conclusion of an authorized third party test.

International Harmonization

SMC members are global technology companies who manufacture security screening equipment that is tested and certified to meet internationally-recognized standards that are often more strict than those in the United States. Industry supports the recommendations contained in the recent

Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC) report titled, “Improving Checkpoints at U.S. Airports”. The ASAC recognizes TSA’s efforts to coordinate the sharing of information with international partners to jointly define requirements and develop new security screening equipment that is capable of detecting explosives and other new threats to aviation. The SMC supports the acceleration of efforts to develop common detection testing and certification protocols with international regulators, and encourages TSA to accept the large amounts of data that are captured during testing and deployment at international airports to strengthen security screening both in the United States and abroad. This will help to improve security by creating common screening protocols and encouraging reciprocity between international partners to improve the passenger experience. It will also drive down the cost of next generation advanced technology by making it more affordable and available to everyone while increasing manufacturing certainty.

Closing

The Security Manufacturers Coalition appreciates the opportunity to share our views and recommendations with the Committee today. These recommendations share broad and unanimous support within our industry, and many were also endorsed by the ASAC, which represents a broad spectrum of aviation stakeholders. The SMC appreciates the work of this Committee and professional staff for its diligent and inclusive efforts in drafting the TSA Modernization Act. The SMC strongly supports this legislation and looks forward to working with you and the TSA to improve the security of the traveling public.