

**Statement of Brian C. Weiler, A.A.E.**  
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**Springfield-Branson National Airport, Missouri**  
**Before the Senate Commerce Subcommittee on Aviation Operations, Safety, and Security**  
**“TSA Modernization: Improvements to Aviation Security”**  
**September 28, 2017**

Chairman Blunt, Ranking Member Cantwell, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss security modernization efforts at the Springfield-Branson National Airport, where I serve as airport director. I am also the immediate Past President of the Missouri Airport Managers Association and have been for over 20 years an accredited member of the American Association of Airport Executives, which represents thousands of men and women across the country who manage and operate our nation’s airports.

My airport is the third largest in the State of Missouri and classified by the Federal Aviation Administration as a small hub airport based on airline passenger volume. We will serve about a million passengers in 2017 with four airlines (American, Delta, United, and Allegiant) and nonstop service to 13 destinations, including an average 30 daily flights to six major airline hubs. The airport also houses a Missouri Air National Guard helicopter repair base, UPS/FedEx air cargo operations, college flight training program, airline maintenance base, and is a U.S. Customs and Border Protection Port of Entry for general aviation and corporate aircraft.

The airport’s 10-gate, 275,000 square foot airline terminal was built in 2009. The current three-lane TSA security checkpoint configuration is two standard lanes with Advanced Imaging Technology (AIT) equipment and one PreCheck lane with a metal detector. Baggage operations are supported with two Explosive Detection System (EDS) CT80 equipment. TSA management for the airport also oversees security operations at six non-hub commercial service airports in our area with one Assistant Federal Security Director (AFSD) and three Transportation Security Managers (TSMs). Recent security enhancements include installation of new AIT equipment in 2014 and PreCheck in 2016. We are scheduled to get a dedicated Known Crewmember Lane in November of this year.

The City of Springfield owns and operates the airport as a municipal enterprise fund department, which means it is run like a business and receives no local tax support. All revenue needed to cover operating costs is generated from user fees, rents, and charges. We focus on generating as much non-aeronautical revenue as possible to keep airline fees low and maintain an environment supporting airline service growth, which is critical to our regional economy. Some examples include operating the 23-county Foreign Trade Zone and redevelopment of our former airline terminal into office space for over 1,000 employees. The airport houses some 40 businesses, employees over 2,000 people, and generates an estimated \$500 million annually in economic impact for Southwest Missouri.

Airline passengers handled by the airport have grown more than 30% over the last five years, which is more than twice the national average annual growth rate of 2-3%. Working with our airline partners, we have added multiple routes, increased frequency, and are transitioning to larger aircraft from the 50-seat regional jets that were primarily serving our markets. While this growth is good and reflects a strong local economy, it has put a strain on airport infrastructure, personnel, and financial resources.

FAA Airport Improvement Program grants have become increasingly hard to get, and the federal cap on local Passenger Facility Charges (PFCs) of \$4.50 has not been increased in 17 years to even keep pace with inflation. Our airport recently had to borrow \$2 million from a local bank to replace three pieces of 35 year old specialized snow removal equipment needed to comply with new FAA runway condition reporting requirements. We are also in the process of making emergency pavement repairs to a primary taxiway that we are unable to get an FAA grant to rebuild. It is a constant challenge to maintain and develop the airport to meet growing public needs within very limited resources, which is why we continue to ask Congress for more local flexibility with the PFC.

I am pleased to say that airport management enjoys an excellent working relationship with and has the highest regard for TSA managers and personnel who work at the Springfield-Branson National Airport. This was also confirmed with the public in a recent passenger satisfaction study that scored efficient/friendly TSA personnel and clean restrooms as our two highest attributes. We all take our jobs seriously and partner together daily to maintain a high level of security for the traveling public in a customer service environment.

Security is a shared responsibility at my airport and every other commercial service airport across the country. It is absolutely imperative that TSA, airport operators, and our industry partners collaborate, communicate, and remain keenly focused on the critical roles that each of us play in ensuring that airport facilities are as safe, secure, and efficient as possible to protect and serve the traveling public.

This background leads to current efforts underway to improve aviation security and my input on four areas within the proposed legislation that the subcommittee may soon consider.

**Exit Lane Technology and Staffing:** Congress has established in law that exit lane staffing is clearly a TSA responsibility. My terminal has a fairly simple design with one exit lane, which is staffed by TSA about 14 hours a day (4:00am – 6:00pm) when the checkpoint is open; then by airport staff for an additional six hours after the last departure at about 6:00pm until the last arrival around midnight. The airport has wanted to automate our exit lane for years, but with no federal cost-share program currently available, the approximate \$300,000 cost is outside of our financial ability. Since TSA and the airport staff our exit lane during different times of the day, both would benefit and save money by automating our exit lane.

The draft legislation includes a pilot program to implement and evaluate automated exit lane technology at small and non-hub airports under a new federal cost-share program. While not for every airport, such a program would give airports like Springfield the ability to work with TSA to automate our exit lane and save money/personnel resources for both agencies. We strongly support this win-win approach to resolving this issue, but ask that the program be implemented at an 85% federal/15% local cost-share so it is attainable for smaller airports that are budget constrained.

**Law Enforcement Officer Reimbursement Grant Program:** The Springfield airport has its own Airport Police Department with 10 sworn officers and a wide area of responsibility over 3,300 acres of property, including providing law enforcement support to the TSA security checkpoint. We are one of approximately 300 airports that utilize the LEO reimbursement grant program, but can testify the current reimbursement rate of \$20/hour only defrays a small portion of our costs to meet security requirements. We have experienced a 28% reduction in LEO reimbursement since 2011. Our current reimbursement of \$104,000 covers about 60% of the \$172,000 it costs to provide law enforcement support to the TSA checkpoint and is just 12% of our annual police personnel budget.

While we appreciate the inclusion of language continuing the LEO reimbursement program at the current funding level of \$45 million, the legislation also proposes to significantly broaden LEO responsibilities beyond those covered by existing security requirements. This includes increasing officer presence in public areas like baggage claim, ticket counters, and nearby roads. While these are certainly worthy goals, adding program responsibilities while keeping funding stagnant creates a significant unfunded mandate on airport operators. This would be difficult for small airports, especially those that utilize local law enforcement (County Sheriff or City Police) to meet these new requirements without hiring additional officers and incurring additional costs.

**PreCheck:** The Springfield airport has seen a 25% increase in our expedited screen rate of our passengers since PreCheck was first implemented at our airport in 2016. We see this as significant progress and support further expansion of the program. However, while TSA continues to slowly grow participation in PreCheck, I continue to hear complaints from my customers about a cumbersome enrollment process and applicants waiting several months to get an appointment interview with an authorized enrollment provider, which there is only one serving my regional area. Just last week, one of my staff checked and the first available appointment was almost three months out.

We suggest that TSA should publish its enrollment standards and that any private sector entity that meets information technology standards to connect into the federal government be allowed to submit applicant data for vetting and eligibility approved by TSA. This would ensure that there are numerous, creative, and easier means for enrolling potential participants, including using kiosks at airports, mobile devices, or other mobile enrollment platforms. Many airports would be willing to host PreCheck enrollment fairs and leverage existing resources, including the ability to facilitate fingerprint based background checks.

**Security Checkpoint Wait Times:** The average security checkpoint wait time at my airport is approximately 13 minutes, which many travelers find to be acceptable. However, as the airport continues to grow, we are seeing significantly longer wait times more often during peak season and peak times during the day. We support the requirement for TSA to make the length of airport wait times at each security checkpoint available to the public within one year. However, we suggest you consider adding more specificity to this requirement.

One area is in the definition of “wait time.” TSA will say this time begins when the traveler enters the checkpoint line until they present their information to the travel document checker. TSA’s definition does not include the time a passenger waits to place their personal items in bins to go into x-ray equipment or when they are screened for threat objects. The traveling public would likely define “wait time” as starting when they enter the line until they retrieve their screened items at the end of the checkpoint. Including a clear definition in the bill would help ensure there is no confusion as to what is being measured.

In conclusion, I want to again express my appreciation for the opportunity to testify today regarding aviation security, which is something that I and my fellow airport executives focus on and prioritize every day. I commend you, Senator Blunt and members of the subcommittee, for your work in trying to provide airports and TSA with additional tools to meet the challenges and threats that continue to emerge through your work on the legislation that is the subject of today’s hearing.

As you move forward with this and other potential legislation, I urge you to recognize that we cannot neglect or cutback on the TSA personnel and other resources needed to maintain effective and efficient security screening of passengers/baggage at airports across the country, large or small. Nor should the costs of this federal security burden be shifted to local airports with limited budgets. Air travel is projected to grow significantly in the years ahead and my airport colleagues and I welcome the opportunity to partner with TSA to enhance security throughout the airport environment.

I look forward to answering any questions you might have.