

January 17, 2019

The Honorable David Pekoske
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
601 South 12th Street
Arlington, VA 20598-6001

Dear Administrator Pekoske:

We write to express profound concern regarding the impact of the partial government shutdown on the functions of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and the dedicated workforce that supports the traveling public.

TSA officers serve a critical role in securing our nation's transportation infrastructure, ensuring the safety of the over 2.6 million passengers who fly within the U.S. every day.¹ Since the shutdown began, TSA screening officers have been required to perform their important duties without pay. An increasing number of TSA officers have reportedly begun calling into work sick, potentially contributing to longer wait times for air travelers² and calling into question the sufficiency of current staffing levels. At New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, some TSA personnel were required to work extra hours unpaid to maintain sufficient staffing.³

The TSA plays a vital role in the performance of our nation's commercial aviation system. Virtually all of TSA's approximately 60,000 employees are not receiving pay during this partial shutdown, and about 55,000 of those workers are being required to continue to work in order to keep passengers moving. TSA officers serve on the front lines of aviation security and any adjustments or changes to staffing levels or morale have the potential to increase security risks and weaken our defenses.

The security of those passengers, however, depends on an engaged and motivated workforce. Unfortunately, TSA has one of the lowest employee satisfaction levels in federal government⁴, and a high turnover rate among screeners that has persisted for years.⁵ As the average annual

¹ "Air Traffic By the Numbers," FAA, 2018

<https://www.faa.gov/air-traffic-by-the-numbers/media/Air-Traffic-by-the-Numbers-2018.pdf>

² "Airport Security Lines Grow Across The Nation As TSA Sickout Continues," Forbes, 7 Jan 2019, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/grantmartin/2019/01/07/airport-security-lines-grow-across-the-nation-as-tsa-sickout-continues/#25dd089765ba>

³ "Hundreds of TSA screeners, working without pay, calling out sick at major airports," CNN, 4 Jan 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/04/politics/shutdown-tsa-screening/index.html>

⁴ <https://bestplacetowork.org/rankings/overall/sub>

⁵ "Low morale at TSA contributing to high turnover rates, long lines," The Hill, 26 May 2019, <https://thehill.com/policy/transportation/281379-low-morale-at-tsa-contributing-to-high-turnover-rates-long-lines>; and "Airport Screeners Often Take Off Shortly After Arrival," BNA, 19 Sept 2019, <https://www.bna.com/airport-screeners-often-n73014482630/>

salary of a TSA officer ranges between \$35,000-\$40,000, many TSA officers live paycheck to paycheck, making the current situation even more untenable. I am deeply concerned that the current situation will only exacerbate morale issues and employee turnover, increasing the burden on remaining employees and causing checkpoint wait times to rise at airports nationwide. Ongoing attrition and low morale within the agency has been a concern for years and the very public nature of the shutdown impacts on TSA officers could have long-lasting impacts on future recruitment and retention efforts.

This burden on TSA agents comes as the shutdown threatens all aspects of our air travel infrastructure. Many Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) safety inspectors have been furloughed, forcing the FAA to prioritize safety actions and increasing the risk that critical safety issues could slip through the cracks.⁶ Further, like TSA officers, air traffic controllers have been required to work without pay. In a January 2, 2019 letter to the President, the nation's largest pilots' union expressed concern that the shutdown "is adversely affecting the safety, security and efficiency of our national airspace system."⁷

As soon as possible but no later than January 31, we are asking for answers to the following questions:

1. How do staffing levels, the number and rate of officer call outs, and passenger wait times compare to similar time periods from each of the prior three years?
2. What steps is the TSA taking to track staffing levels at airport security checkpoints and identify possible deficiencies during the shutdown?
 - a. If deficiencies are identified, what steps will the TSA take to promptly respond? Please provide any examples of such responses during the shutdown.
 - b. Will security standards be adjusted to account for variations in staffing levels? If not, how will TSA make decisions about consolidation or closure of checkpoints in response to staff shortages?
3. What restrictions exist on TSA officers engaging in outside employment, and what approval process, if any, does the TSA utilize for such employment?
 - a. If required, are staff available to approve outside employment for TSA officers during the shutdown? If so, how has their contact information been distributed to TSA officers?
 - b. What guidance has been provided to TSA officers regarding outside employment and how are security managers assessing the impact of any outside employment on job performance?
4. What guidance has been given to TSA shift supervisors as to how to engage employees struggling with economic hardship during the shutdown?
5. Does TSA have a contingency plan to address staffing shortages in the event of continued call outs or resignations?

⁶ "Government shutdown starting to impact air travel," CBS, 8 Jan 2019,

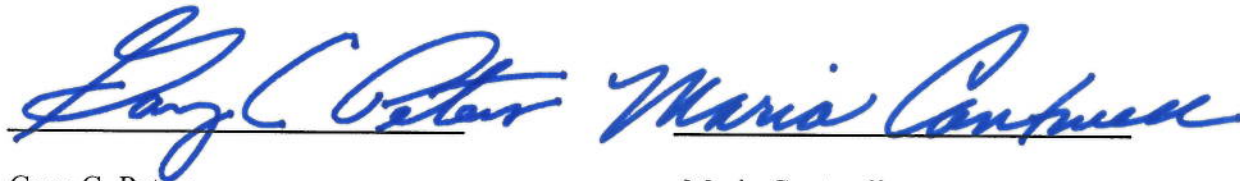
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/government-shutdown-starting-to-impact-air-travel/>

⁷ <http://www.alpa.org//media/ALPA/Files/pdfs/news-events/letters/010219-shutdown-trump.pdf>

- a. Does TSA have access to a surge workforce capacity or are there existing contracting vehicles that can be quickly utilized?
- b. Are field management aware and prepared for adjustments to workforce structure and how will these changes be communicated in the field?
- c. Has TSA examined ways that it can partner with other willing stakeholders, such as airports or airlines, to share certain staffing responsibilities or to mitigate staffing shortfalls?
- d. Will TSA make full use of passenger screening canines to address instances of increased wait times for the duration of the shutdown?

We appreciate your attention to this request and anticipate your prompt response.

Sincerely,

Handwritten signatures of Gary C. Peters and Maria Cantwell in blue ink, positioned above their respective printed names and titles.

Gary C. Peters
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
and Governmental Affairs

Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce,
Science, and Transportation