

APR 01 2015

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
601 South 12th Street  
Arlington, VA 20598



Transportation  
Security  
Administration

The Honorable John Thune  
Chairman  
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Thune:

Thank you for your letter of March 17, 2015, co-signed by your congressional colleagues, regarding recent incidents involving airport credentials and access to secure areas of airports.

As you know, the security of our Nation's airports is a partnered responsibility shared among airport operators, airlines, and tenants. I recognize that the threat posed by insiders is a real and difficult security issue. I share your concerns about these incidents and assure you that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is working internally and with our stakeholders to address any vulnerabilities in the system.

Regarding the issues at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL), TSA took immediate steps at ATL to better mitigate the insider threat. For example, we created a working group in ATL with representation from various stakeholders to further develop plans for improving security. TSA management worked with the General Manager of ATL to develop an enhanced security presence within the airport. The entire aviation community, including the Department of Aviation, Atlanta Police Department, and our airline partners worked in a fully cooperative manner to respond immediately to the newly identified situation.

We increased Playbook operations to focus on screening airport employees at direct access points, such as turnstiles, Secure Area doors and elevators, and vehicle gates. TSA holds weekly meetings with the Atlanta Department of Aviation to discuss and plan joint Playbook operations. As an additional security measure, TSA now requires concessions employees to be screened via Advanced Imaging Technology. It should be noted that both the leadership of ATL and the airlines are committing millions of dollars to inspect employees in secured parking lots. This additional inspection process began immediately on the notification of the identified threat and continues to increase.

On the national level, TSA is examining potential vulnerabilities of the system as a whole, and determining what additional security measures or policy changes may be necessary. TSA realizes the gravity of the ATL incident, and we will continue to work to improve our security practices and procedures to mitigate the recurrence of such an egregious violation of existing security measures. Additionally, as you mentioned, I asked the Aviation Security Advisory Committee to review this issue and look forward to reviewing their recommendations for improving security in an efficient, risk-based manner. We have also created an Insider Threat Advisory Group at our headquarters that includes representation from our field offices.

Regarding your concerns with Secure Identification Display Area (SIDA) badge security, the airport operator, and not TSA, issues and manages the identification (ID) media that allow individuals to have physical access to secure or sterile areas of the airport. TSA's role in the airport badging process is setting regulatory standards. TSA has established requirements via the applicable regulations and Security Directives that the airport is responsible for implementing and following. TSA maintains regulatory oversight of the airports and conducts inspections to ensure the requirements are being followed. Title 49 of the Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), part 1542.211, establishes the requirements for an airport authority, describing when they must issue ID media, how they must account for that ID media, and in combination with 49 CFR 1542.207, describes the security systems, policies, and procedures that are associated with the ID media. Violations of TSA's security regulations will be investigated and may result in civil enforcement procedures, including the imposition of fines.

In addition to setting regulatory standards for SIDA badges, TSA also performs a security threat assessment on all airport-issued badge holders, who are subject to perpetual screening against the Terrorist Screening Database (TSDB). While the airport authority performs the initial adjudication of the criminal history records check for new SIDA badge applicants, TSA has established guidelines to interpreting criminal convictions, which would disqualify an applicant from receiving a SIDA badge as set forth in 49 CFR 1542.209(d).

Regarding your request for a list of all lost, stolen, or otherwise unaccounted for airport employee credentials in the last 5 years, TSA does not maintain a record of lost or unaccounted for airport ID media. Airport operators issue and are responsible for conducting a periodic comprehensive audit of all ID media and must maintain records of those audits for 1 year. If the percentage of unaccounted for or lost media reaches an established threshold for a particular category of access, the airport must reissue all badges in that access category. Additionally, regardless of the percentage of unaccounted for ID media, the airport must periodically reissue all ID media.

I appreciate that you took the time to share your concerns with me and hope this information is helpful. The co-signers of your letter will receive separate, identical responses. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me personally or the Office of Legislative Affairs at (571) 227-2717.

Sincerely yours,



Melvin J. Carraway  
Acting Administrator