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**Before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs**
**"Ten Years After 9/11: The Next Wave in Aviation Security"**
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Chairman Lieberman, Ranking Member Collins, and members of the Committee, on behalf of the American Association of Airport Executives and the thousands of men and women the association represents who operate and manage the nation's airports, I want to thank you for the opportunity to participate in this important hearing on the future of aviation security. Public safety and security are a primary focus of AAAE and airport executives, and we remain committed to working with Congress, the Transportation Security Administration and our industry partners to chart a course forward that builds upon the experiences of the past decade to further enhance security, efficiency, and passenger satisfaction.

**Airports Partner with TSA on Screening and Perform Inherently Local Security Functions**
As you know, airports play a critical role in aviation security, serving as an important partner to TSA in helping the agency meet its core mission of passenger and baggage screening. The significant changes that have taken place in airports over the past decade with the creation of the TSA and its assumption of all screening duties have been aided dramatically by the work of the airport community, and we will serve as a critical local partner to the agency as it continually modifies its operations, including some of the risk-based security initiatives that are under discussion today.

In addition to partnering with TSA to meet its core mission, airports as public entities provide a critical local layer of security, performing a number of inherently local security-related functions at their facilities, including incident response and management, perimeter security, employee vetting and credentialing, access control, infrastructure and operations planning, and a myriad of local law enforcement functions. These important duties have long been local responsibilities that have been performed by local authorities in accordance with federal standards and subject to federal oversight.

Airport operators meet their security-related obligations with a sharp focus on the need to protect public safety, which remains one of their fundamental missions. The professionals who perform these duties at airports are highly trained and have the first responder authorities and responsibilities that we all value immensely. From a security and resource perspective, it is critical that these inherently local functions remain local with federal oversight and backed by federal resources when appropriate.

**Looking Forward: Effectively Targeting Limited Resources is Essential**
Over the past decade, great strides have been made to enhance security at the nation's airports. Among other things, technology that provides unprecedented screening capabilities has been widely deployed and better integrated into airport terminals, and much more is known about those who work in the sensitive areas at all 450 regulated airports.

The challenge for the next decade and beyond is to more effectively utilize and link technologies and information that separate and scrutinize true threats to the system from those who pose little or no risk. Efforts must also be made in the aviation environment to keep TSA focused on its

primary mission of passenger and baggage screening. Expanding the agency's mission – particularly to areas already in capable local hands – threatens to dilute already scarce resources.

The intense pressure on all federal budget resources, continued threats to the aviation system, and growing traffic levels at the nation's airports make the passenger screening protocol that has been in place since 9/11 unsustainable. We simply don't have the resources necessary to continue operating a personnel dependent screening system that treats every traveler the same regardless of the risk they pose to the system.

In our view and in the view of many security experts, one of the key components to improving passenger screening and security is expanding the focus from finding dangerous "things" to finding dangerous "people." After all, the most important weapon that the 19 terrorists had on September 11 wasn't box cutters; it was knowledge – knowledge of our aviation system and existing security protocols, which they used to their advantage.

Recognizing that fact, airport executives and many others have long advocated the adoption of a trusted/known traveler program to better identify and scrutinize potential threats. As you know, the trusted/known traveler concept allows for intense focus on individuals who voluntarily provide information prior to their arrival at the airport, freeing resources at screening checkpoints to focus on those for whom little is known. The result is enhanced security and improved efficiency at screening checkpoints.

The merits of a trusted/known passenger concept are proven and well documented, and the approach has been endorsed by a number of key groups, including the 9/11 Commission. Trusted traveler programs also received prominent attention in the recommendations of then-Secretary Mineta's high-level airport security Rapid Response Team on which I served in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 along with Southwest Airlines executive Herb Kelleher and New York Police Department Commissioner Ray Kelly.

Over the past decade, AAAE and individual airports have worked closely with TSA and the technology community to implement specific programs, including Registered Traveler. In roughly one year, the RT program enrolled more than 250,000 travelers at 24 airports, proving the security and efficiency benefits that adoption of these programs provides.

Although not directly responsible for processing passengers at screening checkpoints, airports long ago recognized that there was great potential value in terms of enhanced security and efficiency with the deployment of trusted traveler programs. Airports have also understood that they are uniquely situated to bring interested parties together to chart a course that would result in the successful deployment and operation of the program.

With more than 700 million passengers traveling through the U.S. aviation system each year – a number that is expected to grow significantly in the years ahead – it is high time that efforts are made to make the promises of a trusted traveler program a reality, and we are pleased that TSA is moving in that direction. A small percentage of frequent air travelers take almost half of the trips through the aviation system, and we should make every effort to provide a different screening protocol for this group. Doing so will help expedite the screening process for all travelers and allow screeners to focus more intensely on unknown and potential threats.

**AAAE Supports TSA's Risk-Based Approach to Passenger Screening**
Airport executives are encouraged by the recent efforts of TSA to move forward with the PreCheck program, a limited, voluntary passenger pre-screening initiative with a small trusted/known traveler population at four airports. Administrator Pistole and his team deserve immense credit for moving forward with the program and with other risk-based initiatives. As I mentioned, airports have long been supportive of the trusted traveler concept that underlies the PreCheck program, and we are eager to work with TSA to expedite the adoption of the program on a wide-scale basis beyond the initial populations and airports.

Airport executives anticipate great success with the PreCheck program and recognize that the next challenge will be moving from a largely airline-centric program in operation at a handful of airports to one that is operational for large numbers of travelers at airport facilities across the country. Airport operators are uniquely situated and qualified to play a key role in assisting TSA in efficiently and effectively growing participation in PreCheck or a similar trusted traveler program. AAAE has established a Security Task Force that is actively involved in discussions with the agency to move in that direction, and we are optimistic those discussions will produce tangible results soon. The group is also working collaboratively with TSA to address issues related to checkpoint configuration, queue management, modified LEO response expectations and public communication.

Airports are confident that in partnership with TSA they can help facilitate the deployment of a robust trusted/known traveler program that focuses on enhanced security above all else in addition to expediting the travel experience. These two pillars are the primary values that the nation's frequent air travelers want and that each of you as policymakers rightly will demand. By bringing efficiency back into the nation's airport screening checkpoints, TSA screeners will be able to better focus their limited resources on the critical task of providing more rigorous screening to individuals about whom we know less than those who use the system the most and have voluntarily submitted background information for extensive vetting and clearance.

**Public/Private Partnership and Collaboration Facilitate Enhanced Security**
While the federal government obviously plays a leading role with regard to passenger pre-screening and other areas of aviation security, airports and the aviation industry can and should play an active role in partnering with the federal government to design and implement meaningful solutions to security challenges – at checkpoints and throughout the airport environment. The establishment of effective public/private partnerships has already proven extremely successful, for example, in building a system for processing fingerprint-based background checks and additional background screening for more than eight million airport and airline employees through the Transportation Security Clearinghouse. I have included a fact sheet on the TSC at the end of my testimony for the Committee's review.

Additionally, we are encouraged by recent efforts by TSA to enhance cooperation with airports on the policy and operational front, including the work of the In-Depth Security Review. The IDSR, which was recently recognized for a TSA Partnership Award, is a collaborative effort between TSA, AAAE, and other aviation interests to review Security Directives and other requirements and provide recommendations on measures that can be updated, rescinded, or consolidated into Airport Security Program amendments.

The IDSR effort has made significant progress in addressing specific areas of concern and stands as a model for collaborative efforts going forward to ensure that policy and operational changes are made in consultation rather than by emergency regulation or directive. In our view, the security interests of the nation are best served when the federal government, local governments, and affected parties work in concert to address outside threats.

**Airport Credentialing and Access Control Should Remain With Local Airport Control**
While airport executives are encouraged by many ongoing initiatives within TSA, we do have concerns about efforts to "harmonize" or "modernize" various aspects of existing transportation worker vetting programs. In the aviation environment, the background check process for workers operates successfully as a federal/local partnership with the federal government holding sole responsibility for security threat assessments and other necessary government checks for prospective workers and with local airport authorities operating and managing enrollment, credentialing, badging, criminal history background check adjudication and access control systems in accordance with strict federal standards.

The current system for aviation ensures the highest level of security by combining the unique local experience, expertise, and knowledge that exists at individual airports with federal standardization, federal oversight, and federal vetting assets. Local involvement provides a critical layer of security and gives airports the operational control they require to ensure that qualified employees receive the credentials they need to work in the airport environment.

In contrast to the long-standing locally controlled credentialing and access control apparatus that exists in the aviation environment, the credentialing/access control system in place in the maritime environment with the Transportation Worker Identification Credential (TWIC) program is relatively new. Under the TWIC model, the federal government or its contractors are responsible for virtually all aspects of the process, including worker enrollment, applicant vetting, credential issuance and some elements of access control. In our view, the early results of TWIC have been uneven at best despite hundreds of millions of dollars in federal investments. The existing system in aviation operates at <u>no cost</u> to the federal government.

Some have suggested abandoning the successful local systems and processes already in place at airports with badging and access control to expand TSA and the federal government's control over more of the process as is the case with TWIC in the maritime environment. Airport executives oppose any move to shift any additional functions in aviation to the federal government and believe that such a move would <u>diminish security</u> by reducing or eliminating a critical, extra layer of security that is already in place in airports and absent with the TWIC approach.

Pursuing such an approach would scuttle a successful local/federal model that has worked well for decades, eliminate local operational control, stymie significant efforts already under way at airports across the country to upgrade and biometrically enable existing airport badging and access control systems, and significantly increase costs to the aviation industry with no demonstrable security benefit.

While the desire to centralize and federalize the process for all transportation worker vetting programs in the name of modernization or harmonization may be understandable from the federal government's perspective, airport executives are concerned about federal intrusion into

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existing processes that have worked well for decades. Airports are also very concerned about having to help foot the bill for these initiatives – estimated at $571 million through 2018 as part of the TTAC Infrastructure Modernization (TIM) program – for changes that provide them with no demonstrable security or operational benefit. The current system in aviation operates efficiently and effectively at a fraction of the cost of other transportation vetting programs and at no cost to the federal government. We want to ensure that remains the case.

Rather than discarding the successful, local systems and processes already in place at airports with credentialing and access control and expanding the agency's already daunting mission, TSA should focus its efforts on improving its own vetting systems. TSA can and should continue with its efforts to modernize and harmonize its internal vetting programs without the need to expand the federal government's responsibilities to include credentialing and access control. Congress should make clear that those responsibilities must remain with local airports as has been the case for decades.

**Biometric Airport Security Identification Consortium (BASIC)**
Before concluding, I want to take this opportunity to bring the Committee up to date on a related topic and the efforts of the Biometric Airport Security Identification Consortium or BASIC initiative. In simple terms, the objective of BASIC is to define a comprehensive, airport-driven Concept of Operations that will enable voluntary migration to biometric-based badging and access control systems at airports. More than 40 airports of all sizes actively participate in BASIC, working cooperatively with TSA and other groups.

Many airport operators are eager to move forward with biometrics, but concerns remain about the prospect of overly prescriptive and costly solutions. Airports are also eager to avoid repeating mistakes made in the past where the federal government required costly and often proprietary access control systems to be deployed in airports in a short period of time. That approach proved both expensive and ineffective.

In an effort to avoid unnecessary regulations and a one-size-fits all mandate regarding biometric-based systems, airports participating in BASIC have identified several key principles that must be part of any future biometric-based badging and access control systems, including:

- Safeguards on local control and issuance of credentials,
- Leveraging of existing capital investments and resources,
- Standards-based open architecture and local determination of qualified vendors, and
- Phased implementation that migrates over time

In addition to building on the processes and regulations already in place at airports today, BASIC is also working to adapt important federal standards regarding secure biometric credentials into the airport's operational environment. For example, Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) 201 and the more recent Personal Identity Verification Interoperability (PIV-I) for Non-Federal Issuers are reflected throughout the BASIC Concept of Operations and greatly inform the recommended phased implementation for airports.

The BASIC working group, which meets on a regular basis, is moving forward aggressively to develop a detailed Concept of Operations that will define the biometric components and common business processes that need to be added to airports' existing procedures to enable biometric-

based badge and access control systems in a reasonable and cost-effective timeframe.  In fact, several airports have already begun to implement the early phases of the BASIC Concept of Operations.  Newark Liberty International Airport, San Francisco International Airport, Aspen Pitkin County International Airport, Los Angeles International and Salt Lake City International Airport – to name just a few – have implemented a secure messaging structure for the submission of biographic security threat assessments and biometric criminal history record checks that will ultimately enable the return of trusted biometrics back to the airport for use on credentials or in access control systems.

Airports are committed to moving forward to bring biometrics into the airport environment as soon as possible in a manner that builds upon existing capabilities and limits operational difficulties.  The BASIC initiative, which is being driven by airports in cooperation with the federal government, offers the best opportunity for making the promises of biometrics a reality in a timely manner.

**Conclusion**
Mr. Chairman, while challenges and frustrations remain on the security front, the experiences of the past decade have both dramatically increased security and left industry and the federal government better equipped to meet future challenges and opportunities.  Airport executives look forward to working closely with TSA and the Congress to ensure that limited federal and local resources are used as effectively as possible to ensure the safety and security of the traveling public.

I appreciated the opportunity to be here today and look forward to any questions you have.

## What is the Transportation Security Clearinghouse and Why was it Created?

Prior to 9/11, aviation workers were required to undergo fingerprint-based criminal history background checks (CHRCs) conducted by the FBI in any instance in which they could not show a 10-year history of continuous employment. The checks were processed by the federal Office of Personnel Management and routinely took weeks to complete, averaging over 50 days for a prospective employee to receive background check results. Those delays kept airport and airline employees from their jobs for extended periods of time while they awaited required checks, imposing a heavy burden on airport operations and employees.

Following 9/11, Congress required that all aviation workers – some one million workers as opposed to the much smaller subset of workers with a break in continuous employment – undergo fingerprint-based criminal history record checks within a year. Recognizing that this important mandate could not be met utilizing the OPM-run process in place at that time, the American Association of Airport Executives created the *Transportation Security Clearinghouse* (TSC) in partnership with the federal government to process the required background checks for aviation workers. The TSC established a high-speed, secure method to collect employee fingerprints for more than 500 airports and multiple airlines across the country for FBI checks, reducing processing times to a matter of hours rather than weeks – and ensuring that the congressional mandate for worker checks was met. Since its establishment, the TSC has processed more than eight million records for vetting against federal criminal history and terrorist data bases.

In addition to facilitating aviation worker CHRCs, the TSC has been instrumental in ensuring that a subsequent TSA mandate to conduct biographic-based security threat assessments (STAs) for workers in and around the aviation environment was completed in a timely manner without major disruptions to airport or aviation system operations.

## The TSC:  A Record of Success at No Cost to the Federal Government

Of the transportation worker vetting programs in existence today, the TSC stands out as a model of success in terms of security benefits achieved; the number of employees vetted; the cost per worker for vetting; costs to the federal government; record processing time; and the error rate for record submissions. **The TSC has built its unparalleled record of success at absolutely no cost to the federal government,** a remarkable fact considering the hundreds of millions of dollars that the federal government has spent to build similar background check programs for port workers and hazardous material truckers. The TSC provides:

- *Exceptional Security:*  The TSC has facilitated the vetting of more than eight million records against federal criminal and terrorist data bases with less cost, implementation time and quicker results than any other comparable vetting program of its kind at **no cost to the federal government.**  The TSC is routinely audited by TSA to ensure that it meets federal requirements for data protection and other strict federal standards. In addition to its benefits to the aviation industry, the TSC has served the federal government by enabling TSA to quickly implement evolving security requirements, including Security Threat Assessments for all aviation workers, with minimal disruptions.

- *Low Costs/Millions in Industry Savings:*  Cost per aviation employee is roughly one-third what port workers and hazardous material truckers pay. Cost reductions and enhanced process efficiencies that have minimized employee time spent waiting for background checks and away from their jobs have resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in cumulative operational savings.