

**Statement of
Mark VanLoh Director of Aviation
City of Kansas City, Missouri
Before the Subcommittee on Transportation Security of the
House Committee on Homeland Security**

“Examining TSA’s Management of the Screening Partnership Program”

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Good Afternoon, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Transportation Security Subcommittee. My name is Mark VanLoh and I am the Director of Aviation for the City of Kansas City, Missouri. Thank you for inviting me to appear before you today to discuss the Airport Screener Partnership Program.

First, I want to describe Kansas City International Airport. It is one the country's major medium hub airports and serves approximately 10 million annual passengers. Designed in the late 1960's, it has three separate semi-circular passenger terminals that are not connected. The lack of a central concourse also creates the need for multiple security screening locations and does not allow for central security screening that is common with more modern airports. Several hundred screeners at several checkpoints are employed to perform passenger screening.

My testimony today addresses the Screener Partnership Program based upon Kansas City’s nearly 12 years of experience

under the program since it began in 2002.

Kansas City was selected by TSA in 2002 under the “pilot program” along with 4 other airports -- San Francisco, Rochester, Tupelo, and Jackson Hole.

It is a partnership that has worked extremely well at Kansas City. I have been an airport operator for 30 years, and in my view the Screening Partnership Program has provided a level of screening services and security protection at least as good as, we think better than, the levels that TSA would have provided using Federal personnel. And, it has done so with operational efficiency and high levels of customer satisfaction. My counterparts at other airports are often envious of our record of service and security. I am always pleased to brag about it.

Often I am asked by the public what an airport director does and on what issue we spend the most time during a normal day. It is not security or safety or airline negotiations but employee issues. With 500 employees, a considerable portion of the day consists of employee performance reviews, labor relations/grievance hearings, disciplinary actions, family medical leaves, random drug screening reviews and other personnel issues. I cannot imagine what amount of time is consumed by TSA with over 50,000 employees. In my

opinion, the majority of efforts by the TSA should be focused on intelligence gathering to reduce the threat against aviation and then issuing policy and procedures to protect our industry not on personnel issues. At Kansas City, the SPP provider handles all the personnel issues leaving TSA to oversee security. The operator and overseer are different entities. This results in built-in accountability and allows each do what they can and should do best.

The advantages of the Screening Partnership Program can be summarized as follows:

- enhanced flexibility and efficiencies in personnel use and deployment.**
- greater flexibility to respond to increased or decreased service requirements.**
- greater flexibility to cross train and cross utilize personnel.**
- not subject to federal employee "hiring freezes" and employment caps. As an aside, during the recent sequestration, while other airports with federal staff were subjected to federal restrictions, we at Kansas City operated normally with no disruptions.**
- More effective in dealing with non-performers. This may sound a bit insensitive but we all know that the job requires an inordinate amount of attention and personal skills. Occasionally an employee may be hired that probably**

shouldn't be in that position. We can all tell the screeners that enjoy their job and want to be there. The SPP provider is able to make changes with minimal disruption to the mission. A high degree of customer service awareness is critical. We all want our passengers to enjoy their airport experience.

The private screening company has greater flexibility than the Federal Government to re-deploy screeners on short notice, to reschedule screener shifts to and from off-hours, and to add or delete screening checkpoints on short notice.

Based on our nearly twelve years of experience under the private screening program, I can report that the Screening Partnership Program has been very effective in providing high quality service to our passengers at a level of security equal to, if not better than, the level that would be provided at the airport using Federal Government employees.

The SPP has been great for Kansas City from the beginning, but has caused me great concern lately given the issues surrounding the rebid of the contract. We are now almost four years outside the expiration of the most recent contract. Even through the uncertainty of not knowing if they will have a job after each holiday season, our screeners have maintained their high level of service and dedication. It is my understanding that this solicitation is now in the Court of

Federal Claims for the third time. The low bidder selected by TSA included across the board pay cuts as well as cuts in hours to all screeners now working at the airport. Meanwhile TSA recently announced pay raises for federal screeners at other airports but selected this low bidder in Kansas City based on this treatment of our existing workforce.

Even with the contract award issues, I firmly believe the program has worked well for Kansas City; there are a number of areas in which the program could be improved.

First, TSA needs to be more flexible in its supervision of private screening companies so as to better foster improvements and innovation. TSA should set minimum levels of security standards and operational procedures, but give the private screeners the flexibility to provide the security in new, different, innovative and creative ways. However, as we understand it, TSA requires federal and private screeners to operate under the same procedures, including centralized procedures for screener hiring and assessments, and coordination or hiring through TSA headquarters. I do not believe that the law requires a one size fits all approach.

Second, TSA should develop staffing resources based on the operational requirements for each airport, not on arbitrary system-wide staffing caps based on the national models it uses for the Federal

workforce. Such an approach would more effectively account for the unique requirements of each airport, including part-time and efficient full time screener schedules. Again, one size doesn't fit all. For example, staffing requirements for Kansas City International Airport, which does not have a single central security location, will be markedly different than the requirements for airports that have centralized security screening facilities.

Third, there needs to be greater coordination with the airport operator. More can be done to get the airport operator's input in the operational procedures, staffing, and other critical activities. For example in TSA's contested contract award that I mentioned above, TSA recently chose to replace Kansas City's longtime private screening company through the bid process, yet never asked Kansas City for our input on the incumbent's prior performance.

Fourth, the choice of screening companies should be based largely on technical capabilities and performance, not on cost. Basing selection primarily on cost considerations we will return us to the poorly performing system that existed pre-9/11 where contracts were generally awarded to the lowest cost bidder, manned by screeners who lacked experience, critical skills and performance incentives. TSA needs to ensure that the selection is truly a "best value".

In conclusion, the Screening Partnership Program has worked well at Kansas City International Airport. It has shown that private screeners under the direct oversight of the TSA will perform excellent security and customer service and at reasonable costs. Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to address any questions you and the members of the Subcommittee may have.