

TESTIMONY OF
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ASSOCIATION OF FLIGHT ATTENDANTS - CWA
BEFORE
THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC SECURITY,
INFRASTRUCTURE PROTECTION AND CYBERSECURITY
OF THE HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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I am Candace Kolander, Coordinator of the Air Safety, Health and Security Department at the Association of Flight Attendants-CWA and a FAA-certified flight attendant. AFA is the world's largest flight attendant union. We represent more than 40,000 flight attendants at 26 airlines.

I want to thank the Subcommittee for holding this hearing, and I'd like to begin by taking note of the progress that has been made in aviation security screening in the nearly four years since the terrorist attacks of September 2001. While there is an ongoing need to improve airport security screening effectiveness, there has been overall improvement since 9/11. Explosives detection systems have been installed at most U.S. commercial airports to provide the capability to screen all checked baggage for explosives. TSA also has expanded screener training and developed performance measures and indicators for the screening systems.¹

Certainly, however, more needs to be done. Today's hearing focuses on TSA's screening of airline crew, an important component of the overall screening picture. We understand that some members of the Committee staff objected to us having the opportunity to testify on this matter today. And that's a bit frustrating to us. We think it is only natural for flight attendants to have a say on this subject. Because, believe it or not, flight attendants are subject to the same level of screening and background checks as pilots, with the exception of those pilots participating in the FFDO program. So in that respect, we're all the same here. And I think it's important for everyone to remember that flight attendants are an integral part of the crew in terms of safety and security.

¹ Transportation Security, Systematic Planning Needed to Optimize Resources, GAO-05-357T, Feb.15,2005.

Today, I'd like to share with you the perspective of flight attendants on the screening of airline crew, which turns out to be quite a significant stressor in their work environment. In the post-9-11 environment, flight attendants are under increased scrutiny by airport security and in some cases they find this screening to be excessive and unnecessary. As reported in a recent study², some feel it is unfair that they should receive more attention, given the fact that flight attendants have aviation security clearance and because, as one flight attendant pointed out, "there has never been a flight attendant in the history of plane incidents who was involved in a problem that brought a plane down." One participant said that flight attendants are "treated like criminals because we are the most public, while others walk right through or never get checked." This increased attention has made it that much more difficult to get to work. Although there is a "new empathy" for the passenger caught up in lengthy airport security lines, allowances aren't made for this by some supervisors, and so they have feel under increased scrutiny by their company as well as airport security.

In a recent informal spot check that AFA did with flight attendants around the country, part of the frustration that came through loud and clear from our member flight attendants was that their treatment varies greatly from station to station. As one flight attendant reported, "most of the time I pass through without difficulty -- but sometimes it seems as though certain individuals and/or stations have an agenda for harassing crewmembers." I might add that this particular flight attendant cited screening at Washington National as a particular problem. On one recent flight, he watched for 20

² Impact of the 9/11 Attack on Flight Attendants: A study of an Essential First Responder Group; U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services funded study, 2003.

minutes as the screener leered at him while taking every piece of clothing from his suitcase and spreading it out on the search table, then removing every item from his flight bag in a similar fashion. He went on to say that about once or twice a month he goes through some version of this treatment somewhere in the country.

Another flight attendant related her experience at McCarran Airport in Las Vegas as particularly problematic. United flight attendants who are based in Las Vegas must arrive at the airport 1 to 2 hours or more ahead of their check-in time in order to stand in line for security screening to enter the gates. They have no designated screening line for crew there. TSA employees who arrive late are allowed to go to the head of the line for screening yet flight attendants who need to get to work are left cooling their heels.

We also hear from time to time of more egregious problems. For example, about six months ago one of our flight attendants was subjected to a troubling groping examination by a female TSA screener in Lexington. The screener used the palms of her hands to cup the flight attendant's breasts and trace around their perimeter. This particular flight attendant had not caused the portal alarm to go off prior to being chosen for the hand search, and she felt very violated by this employee.

Now, I want to stress that these problems matter from a policy standpoint far

beyond the obvious hassle and intimidation factor for flight attendants simply trying to get to work on time. If screeners are devoting undue amounts of time to examining flight attendants, that is time that could be better spent screening out true security threats. And if flight attendants aren't able to reach their workplaces – the airplane – on time, then their ability to perform their safety and security duties is compromised as well. Remember, flight attendants are responsible for performing pre-flight safety and security duties on the plane.

So, yes, there are problems with the current screening practices. It's terrible that flight attendants sometimes are harassed or singled out for extra screening. But at the same time, we understand and completely support the need for careful screening of every person entering the aircraft. And we are confident that there is a way to accommodate both the needs of flight attendants to reach planes in a timely manner and without excessive or intrusive screening experiences and the need to ensure that every person entering every aircraft has been thoroughly screened. We will leave it up to the experts to come up with the exact solution, be that separate lanes to expedite screening of flight crew or some other fix.

But let me just suggest that there is a crying need for TSA to devote serious resources to the development of a transportation workers identification credential that will promote expedited screening of those who most frequently must pass through airport security. This credential could employ biometrics, such as fingerprints, to get flight attendants and others through quickly. We aren't suggesting that physical screening of flight attendants be abandoned once such a credential is developed, but rather that both have a part to play in developing a layered security system that can protect against catastrophic attack. Such a layered security system has been recommended by

the 9-11 Commission Staff as key to ensuring that a single-point failure in the system is not catastrophic.

I'd like also to take the opportunity to make mention of two other flight attendant priorities that we'd like to see receive much-needed attention from policymakers: the need for effective security training for flight attendants and the need for better avenues for communication aboard the aircraft among crew members.

Although federal guidance on response to security threats aboard aircraft calls upon the cabin crew to protect the flight deck, stop any attempted hijack and protect lives in the passenger cabin, the current requirements for security training and equipment fail to provide the tools and training necessary for the flight attendant crew to carry out this mission.

Flight Attendant crewmembers must have standardized security and self-defense training in order to prepare them for potential threat conditions. The training must be appropriate and effective, so that the flight attendants will be prepared to properly respond to any level of verbal or physical aggression encountered.

Flight attendants are capable of learning and applying appropriate basic self-defense strategies and techniques if the program is science-based and mandatory. They must all receive the same training, and work together as a team to immediately counter any apparent or potential threat. Civilians have been shown to be capable of learning basic self-defense techniques in order to effectively respond to the types of threats faced by flight attendants.

In order for this training to be appropriate and effective, it must include three major learning components.

First, trainees must have classroom training for cognitive learning.

Second, they must experience effective hands-on training for learning of the basic physical skills and integration of the cognitive material.

Third, they must participate in live situational training exercises regarding the various threat levels to integrate the cognitive, physical, and emotional skills under a safe but appropriately stressful training environment.

The above training must include:

- a). behavioral profiling to assist in identifying and coping with potential aggression and
- b). crew communication and coordination which is critical as it relates to the survival of all crewmembers and passengers and the overall control of the aircraft. Even with hardened flightdeck doors, the Federal Flight Deck Officers program, and the Federal Air Marshal program, all crewmembers must be prepared to immediately respond during a terrorist attack. In these situations a lag in response time due to poor communications and coordination can prove just as fatal as it did on September 11, 2001. Even with the heroic efforts of those involved with Flight 93, this lag time proved fatal to all persons on-board the aircraft.

Flight attendants are the only true professional first responders in the cabin of every commercial airline flight (with over 19 seats). The self-defense training should include the appropriate manner in which to interact with both the Federal Air Marshals and Flight Deck Officers who are present on some flights.

The training program should be developed, overseen and audited by a federal law enforcement agency which would determine appropriate curriculum and certification criteria for trainers as well as public or private regional and local training facilities across the country which would allow for decentralized training and collaterally benefit state and local economies. Training close to the homes and bases of the flight attendants and instructors will allow for the type of 1 to 2 hour repeat training sessions necessary for it to be truly effective and would all but eliminate travel and lodging costs.

Scientific testing should be conducted to determine and establish the minimum

requirements for the basic course and recurrent training. These minimum requirements should include the qualifications for the primary and assistant instructors, the minimum teacher-student ratio, and the minimum requirements for the regional and local training facilities.

To enable effective communication and coordination when suspicious activities or terrorist threats are in progress, discrete hands-free wireless communication devices to permit immediate communication between all crewmembers and Federal air marshals (FAMs), must be provided. Such a device would also facilitate discrete and timely communications from pilots to flight attendants regarding safety issues, such as more detailed turbulence warnings to help prevent injuries and reduce associated costs to industry.

In order for flight attendants to learn and apply appropriately basic self-defense strategies, tactics, and techniques, they must all receive the same training and work together as a team to immediately counter any apparent or potential threat. In this way we can ensure that the next flight attendants and pilots that come face to face with committed terrorists have the ability to save themselves, their passengers, and the aircraft.