



Eric Bunn Sr.
National Secretary-Treasurer

Dr. Everett B. Kelley
National President

Jeremy A. Lannan
NVP for Women & Fair Practices

February 8, 2021

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO (AFGE), which represents more than 700,000 federal and District of Columbia employees in 70 agencies, including the 44,000 Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) who protect the flying public, I ask you to cosponsor three pieces of legislation affecting the work and rights of TSOs.

First, I ask you to cosponsor H.R. 903, the “Rights for the Transportation Security Administration Workforce Act of 2021” introduced by Homeland Security Committee Chairman Bennie Thompson (D-MS). When the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) was established, its administrator was given uniquely broad authority over the workforce to set pay and working conditions. As a result, TSOs do not benefit from the Fair Labor Standards Act or the General Schedule pay scale and do not have representational rights accorded by Congress to most of the federal workforce under the Civil Service Reform Act of 1978. TSOs cannot appeal adverse personnel decisions to a neutral third party, rights that are held by most law enforcement officers who serve elsewhere within the Department of Homeland Security.

Even as TSOs have conducted their essential national security duties without fail throughout the Coronavirus Pandemic, they are doing so at the risk of their health and lives and those of their families. Yet they are among the lowest paid federal workers and have the fewest rights at work. To date, more than 6,500 individuals at TSA, mostly in the screening workforce have contracted the virus and tragically, 15 have lost their lives.

H.R. 903 honors TSOs’ dedication to America’s aviation security by:

- Repealing the TSA Administrator’s authority to maintain a separate and unequal personnel system that applies only to the TSO workforce;
- Ending the current TSA personnel directives that have allowed TSA to be the judge and jury, with no neutral third-party review, in workforce disciplinary matters;
- Requiring TSA to follow the labor-management employee relations statutes that provide workplace rights and protections to most federal government employees under Title 5 of the U.S. Code; and
- Putting TSOs on the General Schedule pay scale with regular step increases, under which most federal employees’ pay is determined.



Last Congress, the U.S. House of Representatives passed similar legislation on March 5, 2020 by a bipartisan vote of 230-171. To cosponsor H.R. 903, please contact Stephen Williams, Stephen.Williams@mail.house.gov.

In addition to your co-sponsorship of H.R. 903, AFGE asks that you become an original cosponsor of two pieces of legislation that were also introduced in the last Congress that would better the TSO workforce and aviation security in America.

Congresswoman Julia Brownley (D-CA) is planning to reintroduce the “Honoring Our Fallen TSA Officers Act” soon and we ask that you become an original cosponsor. The measure would provide Public Safety Officer Benefits (PSOB) to TSOs when they become permanently disabled and to their families when they are killed in the line of duty. Transportation Security Officers are frontline employees who face risks every day keeping the flying public safe and contributing greatly to our nation’s security. Congresswoman Brownley originally introduced this legislation following the shooting death of an officer at the Los Angeles International Airport in 2013. Today one of the threats faced by TSOs includes death and disability from contracting COVID-19 on the job. TSOs are among the lowest paid federal employees, leaving them far less able to provide for themselves and their families should they become disabled, and little to leave their survivors.

This legislation (H.R. 372 in the 116th Congress) had broad bipartisan support in the House. Access to the PSOB program does not change job status or title; it simply provides a humane benefit under the most tragic of circumstances for these frontline employees and their families. To cosponsor, please contact Sharon Wagener on Congresswoman Brownley’s staff, Sharon.Wagener@mail.house.gov.

Finally, AFGE asks you to become an original cosponsor of the “Funding for Aviation Screeners and Threat Elimination Restoration (FASTER) Act” soon to be reintroduced by Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR). The bill would restore revenues from aviation security fees established following September 11, 2001 to help finance the cost of aviation security. Since 2013, one-third of the security fee revenues have been diverted to the General Fund to pay for unrelated government spending. By FY 2027, more than \$19 billion will have been diverted away from aviation security unless Congress acts.

This legislation (H.R. 1171 in the 116th Congress) has enjoyed strong bipartisan support and helps to ensure that taxpayers’ transportation security fees are spent as they are intended – for aviation security. To become an original cosponsor, please contact James Huddleston on Congressman DeFazio’s staff, James.Huddleston@mail.house.gov.

AFGE appreciates your support of our nation's TSOs and we look forward to working with you on these and other pieces of legislation that improve the agency and rights and its dedicated workforce. If you have any questions about AFGE's positions on these bills or about the legislation, please contact Julie Tippens, Julie.Tippens@afge.org.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alethea Predeoux". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Alethea Predeoux
Director, Legislative Department