BENNIE G. THOMPSON, MISSISSIPPI
CHAIRMAN

PETER T. KING, NEW YORK
RANKING MEMBER

One Hundred Eleventh Congress
U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20515

December 8, 2009

Gale Rossides
Acting Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
601 South 12th Street
Arlington, VA 20598

Dear Ms. Rossides:

Earlier this week, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) discovered a breach in Sensitive Security Information (SSI) related to management screening operations at airports. According to a public announcement made by TSA, the Screening Management Standard Operating Procedures manual was "improperly posted by the agency to the Federal Business Opportunities Web site wherein redacted material was not properly protected." Although TSA has removed the document from the government contracting website, several online sources have compromised the document by uploading it on to their websites[i]. We are deeply concerned by this incident, as it appears to demonstrate some challenges TSA faces in the handling of SSI. Undoubtedly, this raises potential security concerns across our transportation system. Importantly, TSA has indicated that it has begun a full review of this incident. Nevertheless, we recommend that TSA engage a third party government agency to conduct a review of this incident and offer recommendations to avoid a similar incident happening again.

Pursuant to Code of Federal Regulations Parts 15 and 1520, TSA may designate an SSI label to any document that contains information that may be disseminated on a "need to know" basis. The document that was breached included the SSI classification and included certain information that should have not been widely distributed to the public. Because we are unclear of the ramifications, if any, that this breach may pose to security efforts at our airports, we would like additional clarification about potential security vulnerabilities created by the inadvertent dissemination of this information and any mitigation measures that have been put in place by TSA. Accordingly, pursuant to House Rule X, 3 (g) in Rule XI of the Rules of the United States House of Representatives, please provide the information requested below no later than December 22, 2009:

1. What steps is TSA taking at commercial service airports to mitigate the release of the security sensitive screening protocols contained in the Standing Operating Procedures (SOP)?

2. Why is the Screening Management Standard Operating Procedures manual classified as SSI?

3. What is TSA's standard operating procedure when screening TSA documents and issuing an SSI classification? Please describe the steps taken by each component at the Department involved in making such determinations.

4. Please describe the procedures TSA follows in order to post SSI documents online?

5. What is your practice when issuing a classification for a document that may contain information within multiple classification levels and what may be considered SSI?

6. When was the document posted on the Federal Business Opportunities Web site?

7. When and how did TSA discover that the document was improperly protected?

8. What steps did TSA take immediately after it discovered that the document had been breached? What is TSA's chief concern regarding the disclosure of the content in the document?

9. Aside from TSA's internal review of the incident, will TSA be requesting that a third party government organization conduct a review of this incident and assess potential implications that this breach may have on aviation security?

10. Was this breach an isolated incident? Have there been other similar breaches in Sensitive Security Information in the past? Please provide us with a detail listing of these breaches, if any.

If you have any questions regarding the contents of this letter, please contact Mike Beland, Subcommittee Staff Director, at 202-226-2616.

Sincerely,

BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chairman

SHEILA JACKSON-LEE
Subcommittee Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Transportation
Security and Infrastructure Protection

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[i] "The TSA Makes Another Stupid Move." The Wandering Aramean. 7 Dec. 2009. <http://www.wanderingaramean.com/2009/12/tsa-makes-another-stupid-move.html>

Blank, Jared. "TSA Puts (Confidential) Screening Procedures Online (Not A Good Idea)." Online Travel Review. 7 Dec. 2009. <http://www.onlinetravelreview.com/2009/12/07/tsa-puts-confidential-screening-procedures-online-not-a-good-idea/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+onlinetravelreview%2FNEGA+%28Online+Travel+Review%29>

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