



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

August 20, 2009

The Honorable Janet Napolitano
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Napolitano:

We are writing to express our concern about the future of the Registered Traveler (RT) program given the recent cessation of operations of this public-private partnership by all service providers. Specifically, we are writing to express our grave concern about the Transportation Security Administration's plans to have biometric data and unique identifiable information of all RT program participants deleted from the Registered Traveler Central Information Management System (CIMS database). We believe that permanently removing this data from CIMS or, for that matter, dismantling the database, could have a potential negative impact on the restoration of operations for the RT program.

Since service providers began ceasing operations in June, Acting Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Administrator Gale Rossides has written the Committee that safeguards are in place to protect the personal information of RT program participants that is being stored at various locations. However, we have recently learned that TSA has ordered the removal of RT member data from the CIMS database, a database that the American Association of Airport Executives (AAAE) maintains on behalf of TSA to ensure interoperability among Registered Traveler service providers operating at various airports throughout the Nation, because, as TSA explains, in the absence of multiple service providers, the database is not necessary. We believe that the plan to sweep all of the information from this database is shortsighted and could potentially undermine restoration of the program, as travelers will have far less incentive to enroll in the program if there is no interoperability at airports around the country. We would add that since the biometric data in the CIMS database is safely stored, with the information tied to unique identifiers and inaccessible to anyone with an individual's biographic information, it is unclear why TSA is directing the destruction of this vital component of the Registered Traveler program—thereby potentially hamstringing the participation by service providers in the program.

As authorized by the Aviation and Transportation Security Act of 2001[P.L 107-71], the Registered Traveler program was envisioned as security program that would fit into a layered system of aviation security by allowing risk-based security screening for participants or “known” travelers that provide their biometrics and thereby freeing Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) to focus screening on “unknown” passengers. Although, to date, the security benefits envisioned for the program have not been fully realized, the risk management approach of this trusted passenger program has merit as a potential security measure and should be further explored. Since 2001, support for this trusted traveler approach has not waned in the Congress. In fact, with the bipartisan passage of H.R. 2200, the Transportation Security Administration Act of 2009, the House reaffirmed support for the approach and directed TSA to report on how the program can be integrated into risk-based aviation security operations and further leveraged by developing procedures for the participation of military personnel and individuals with security clearances.

With a nominee for TSA Administrator still unnamed, we respectfully urge that no further action be taken to dismantle the CIMS database or delete information stored within it, in order to allow the new TSA leadership to explore how to restore and transform the RT program into the security program that Congress envisioned.

We thank you for your timely consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please contact Rosaline Cohen, Chief Counsel at 202-226-2616.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Chairman



PETER T. KING
Ranking Member

Cc: TSA Administrator (Acting) Gale Rossides