

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 12, 2011

The Honorable John Pistole
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
601 South 12th Street
Arlington, VA 20598

Dear Administrator Pistole:

I am deeply concerned about the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) ability to secure Newark Liberty International Airport – one of the busiest airports in the nation. A recent report by TSA managers in New Jersey reportedly acknowledges serious and systemic security problems at the airport. In light of this report and the recent proliferation of security breaches at the airport, I urge you to personally examine the security situation at Newark Liberty to ensure the most stringent security measures are being enforced.

According to a report obtained by the *Star-Ledger* newspaper, the security performance of Newark Liberty has been on a gradual decline. The report states that understaffing, complacency, poor communication, and a lack of training and guidance are contributing to the security problems at the airport. The report also proposes a series of recommendations including increased hiring and training.

Based on the series of recent breaches at Newark Liberty, the current security measures are insufficient. Last year, a security breach on January 3, 2010 shut down a terminal at Newark Liberty for more than six hours, canceled 27 flights, and affected 16,000 passengers around the globe. Since the beginning of 2011, there have been at least seven additional security breaches at Newark Liberty, including the following incidents:

- Jan. 4, 2011 – a dead dog was loaded onto a passenger flight from EWR to Los Angeles, contrary to proper security procedures. After learning of the breach, TSA considered recalling the flight but decided not to do so.
- Jan. 16, 2011 – TSA shut down a security checkpoint in Terminal C because a carry-on bag containing a knife made it through screening. The checkpoint reopened 45 minutes later.
- Jan. 30, 2011 – A bag was improperly handed off after being x-rayed.
- Feb. 1, 2011 – A passenger in Terminal B walked through a disability area without being screened.
- Feb. 3, 2011 – Two passengers were allowed through a Terminal B checkpoint even though the monitor of the full-body scanner at that checkpoint was malfunctioning.

- Feb. 21, 2011 – An improperly screened passenger was allowed to enter the secure area of Terminal B. TSA agents then shut down the checkpoint, found the passenger and rescreened him or her.
- March 17, 2011 – A mother passed through security with a steak knife inadvertently in her child's carriage. The knife was meant for cutting up her son's snack. After discovering the error, she voluntarily told an airline employee and turned the knife into security.

To address my growing concern with security at Newark Liberty, in February I called on the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General to conduct an immediate investigation into Newark Airport. Inspector General Richard Skinner has informed me that the Department is reallocating resources from other projects to take a more in-depth look at Newark Liberty's security breaches.

There is no margin for error when it comes to the lives of passengers traveling through Newark Liberty International Airport. The airport serves more than 33 million passengers each year – an average of more than 90,000 passengers every day. It is also considered one of the most dangerous areas in the country for a terrorist attack, and one of the planes hijacked on September 11, 2001 took off from Newark Liberty.

While I am pleased to see TSA managers in New Jersey taking proactive steps to address these security concerns, I believe this situation requires a greater level of oversight. To ensure the safety and security of the travelling public, I request that you personally review the situation at Newark Liberty and brief me on the steps being taken by TSA to address these security issues.

Sincerely,



FRANK R. LAUTENBERG

Vice Chairman

Subcommittee on Homeland Security

Senate Appropriations Committee