



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

September 6, 2016

The Honorable John Katko  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Transportation Security  
Committee on Homeland Security  
1123 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Katko:

On August 14, 2016, there were reports of an active shooter in terminal 8 of John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK). In an abundance of caution, the police from the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey immediately evacuated the terminal. Fortunately, there was no active shooter, and the reports proved to be false. While these reports were a false alarm, the response to this scare raises glaring issues that should be immediately addressed by this Subcommittee.

Accounts of airport contract employees at JFK the evening of the incident indicate that not all airport employees are prepared to handle an emergency.<sup>1</sup> Baggage handlers, contract security guards, and custodians have stated that they had not received training on how to respond to a terror attack or large scale violence.<sup>2</sup> One witness, a security guard for JFK, stated that he had not been instructed on how to handle a large crowd and was uncertain of a designated evacuation site.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the incident at JFK, last week the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) had a similar situation where there were false reports of an active shooter. Once again we witnessed passengers self-evacuating to places such as the tarmac, which is a highly-restricted and sensitive area.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rich Schapiro, "Kennedy Airport Employees are Unprepared to Deal with an Emergency, Employees Reveal After JFK Shooter Scare," *Daily News New York*, (August 20, 2016), <http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/queens/kennedy-airport-employees-unprepared-deal-emergency-article-1.2759390> (last accessed August 23, 2016)

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> Dan Weikel, Ruben Vives and Brittny Meija, False Report of Shooter at LAX Triggers Panic and Hundreds of Flight Delays. (August 29, 2016), <http://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-airport-shooter-20160828-snap-story.html> (last accessed August 31, 2016)

Some of the events that occurred at JFK and LAX are reminiscent of the accounts we heard following the fatal shooting at LAX in 2013, where a lone gunman opened fire within the airport, killing one transportation security officer and wounding three others.<sup>5</sup> The Los Angeles World Airports issued an after action report<sup>6</sup> exposing the weakness associated with the active shooter response. According to the report, airport workers who tried to lead evacuees were overwhelmed by the number of evacuees and had no knowledge of the evacuation plan.<sup>7</sup>

In the wake of the LAX shooting, this Subcommittee took action by holding a two-part hearing on lessons learned from the fatal LAX shooting. During that hearing, then-Transportation Security Administration (TSA) Administrator John Pistole testified that TSA requires each airport to produce practical evacuation routes and establish meeting points.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, he stated that there is currently a national model regarding Active Shooter Mitigation with which all airports must comply.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, the TSA recommended that airport operators perform training for active shooter situations twice a year.<sup>10</sup>

Earlier this Congress, you introduced and I cosponsored the *Gerardo Hernandez Airport Security Act of 2015*.<sup>11</sup> This legislation, which the President signed into law, requires that TSA confirm that all airports have incident response plans including plans for events such as an active shooter or act of terrorism. These plans include evacuating individuals within airports and having a communications plan for the employees and contractors within the perimeter of the airport.

As we agree that there is a need for a well-prepared and widely distributed plan to be in place in the event of an active shooter situation or any other incident that causes a mass evacuation, I urge you to hold a hearing on the incidents at JFK and LAX to better understand how airports can have a comprehensive evacuation process that is disseminated to all employees, including contract workers. Furthermore, the hearing should explore how the airports are implementing the national model regarding Active Shooter Mitigation. I hope we can have the hearing while Congress is in session in September.

Thank you for your attention to this request. If you or your staff have any questions regarding this request, please contact Cedric Haynes, Subcommittee Director at 202-226-2616.

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<sup>5</sup> Active Shooter Incident and Resulting Airport Disruption, A Review of response Operations. Los Angeles World Airports. 18 March 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Id.

<sup>7</sup> Id. Page 61.

<sup>8</sup> Statement of Administrator John Pistole. Subcommittee on Transportation Security. Hearing titled: "Lessons from the LAX Shooting: Preparing for and Responding to Emergencies at Airports". 28 March 14.

<sup>9</sup> Id.

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> Gerardo Hernandez Airport Security Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-50, § 3, 129 Stat. 490, 490 (2015).

Sincerely,



KATHLEEN M. RICE  
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Michael T. McCaul, Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security  
The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson, Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland  
Security