

February 12, 2016

Hon. Peter Neffenger
Transportation Security Administration
601 12th St.
Arlington, VA 22202

Dear Administrator Neffenger:

The purpose of this letter is to update you on the status of the passenger screening process and relationship with the TSA at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL).

I'll begin this letter by saying that in terms of the partnership between the Airport and the TSA, I can confidently say that no closer coordination exists than that between ATL and Atlanta FSD Mary Leftridge Byrd and her team.

There is a cohesive and respectful relationship that helps ensure successful operations. Local TSA is very insightful and always willing to assist. ATL security staff and executive leadership meet almost daily, and formal meetings are scheduled bi-weekly.

However, Hartsfield-Jackson is still plagued by inadequate TSA staffing. ATL struggled with TSA staffing shortfalls in 2015, and the Airport is dreading the outcome of summer 2016. The TSA did execute a 7.5 percent increase in staffing. This increase – while appreciated – was late and inadequate.

We started 2015 woefully understaffed. Through the persistent efforts of FSD Mary Leftridge Byrd, the recognition of the domestic checkpoints as three separate and distinct checkpoints (6 lanes Terminal North, 4 lanes Terminal South and 18 lanes Main Terminal) came, but later in the summer. This was compounded by the fact that in your agency's fiscal year ending September 2015, Atlanta's TSA passenger traffic grew 10 percent over the previous fiscal year. As a result, several times throughout the day from May to October 2015, wait times exceeding 35 minutes were not uncommon. This morning as I write this letter, wait times up to 52 minutes were experienced between 6:00 am and 6:30 am. This is unacceptable as reflected in the customer service surveys of our hub carrier Delta Air Lines.

We fear an even busier summer this year. In the first quarter of your agency's current fiscal year that began Oct. 1, 2015, Atlanta's passenger traffic has jumped 14 percent over the first quarter of the previous fiscal year. And we know of no staffing plans to service this mammoth growth in demand.



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We are working hard to do our part. We have been collaborating with the FSD and have launched a joint local campaign to boost the number of pre-check passengers. This includes tapping into the membership of Atlanta's local-area chambers of commerce to promote the pre-check program amongst their membership, and asking large corporations to follow the City of Atlanta Department of Aviation's lead to promote and fund their traveling-employees' application for Global Entry or TSA Pre-Check Program. We have pushed for, and have been made a part of, the joint program by Airports Council International (ACI World) and the International Air Transport Association (IATA) to join their Smart Security Program, so that we may, in collaboration with TSA and our airline partners, participate and invest in leading-edge technology and process realignments, to facilitate more effective and efficient screening at ATL's security checkpoints.

Even with all of our efforts, however, as the airport's experience demonstrates, things appear to be only getting worse. It is for this reason that we are giving serious consideration to your agency's Screening Partnership Program (SPP), which allows airport operators to apply to have passenger and baggage screening performed by qualified private contractors – essentially privatizing the security screening process. We have been conducting exhaustive research with current SPP airports, weighing both the pros and the cons, and barring the implementation of some transformational technology or a dramatic shift in the staffing allowances in the next 60 days, Hartsfield-Jackson will take steps to launch SPP at the world's most traveled airport.

It would be my privilege to speak with you more on these issues with the goal of arriving at a solution to boost the effectiveness and efficiency of Atlanta's passenger screening.

Sincerely,



Miguel Southwell

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