

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 22, 2019

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<http://blumenthal.senate.gov>

The Honorable David Pekoske
Administrator
Transportation Security Administration
601 South Twelfth Street
Arlington, VA 20598-6001

Dear Administrator Pekoske:

I write to express my deep concern about reports that the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is requesting that hundreds of employees volunteer to go to the southern border. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is also requesting diversion of TSA funds to be spent on border operations in a continuing pattern of inappropriately misdirecting funding for a politically motivated obsession with immigration enforcement. I write seeking more information on how the agency plans to ensure the continued safety of the traveling public and commerce with a reduced workforce and budget. Additionally, I have serious concerns about the impact that this move will have on consumers – potentially leading to longer security lines at TSA screening checkpoints during the coming months, the busiest travel season of the year.

Last week, it became clear that TSA is soliciting volunteers from its entire workforce – including baggage screeners, federal air marshals, and Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response (VIPR) teams – to assist with operations on the southwest border.¹ Reports also indicate that DHS is requesting \$232 million from TSA's Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget for border operations.² I am strongly opposed to redistributing money already set aside to purchase advanced airport screening equipment and provide compensation to TSA employees who are injured on the job. I urge you to reject these proposals. I appreciate the important work of TSA in protecting our transportation network, but I am also concerned that the reassignment of security professionals and funding will harm the agency's ability to carry out its mission and negatively affect its workers.

As you know, TSA has struggled over the years to maintain robust staffing levels due to high turnover and inadequate funding. I continue to work closely with my Senate colleagues to address these issues, which already imperil the safety of the traveling public. Now is not the time to make the situation worse. Airports around the country are already expressing similar concerns,

¹ Rene Marsh and Gregory Wallace, "TSA to deploy hundreds, including air marshals, to border," *CNN* online, last modified May 16 2019.

² Ainsley, Julia, "DHS backup border funding plan would take millions from TSA, other agencies," *NBC News* online, last modified May 21 2019.

and the security implications are compounded by the potential for longer lines and lengthy delays for consumers. It remains unclear why hundreds of TSA personnel and hundreds of millions of TSA funds are needed to provide additional support at the southern border, given the potential consequences these decisions may have domestically – including the increased threats to transportation security and disruptions for travelers.

To help me understand the security impacts of the reassignments and reallocation of funds at TSA, and to identify how these changes will affect passenger wait times at airports across the country, I respectfully request that you provide me with information regarding how TSA will ensure that there are no disruptions at airports or transportation hubs throughout the United States.

We appreciate your prompt attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Richard Blumenthal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" and last name "Blumenthal" clearly legible.

Richard Blumenthal
United States Senate