

KATHY CASTOR
14TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY
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SELECT COMMITTEE ON
THE STRATEGIC COMPETITION
BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
AND THE CHINESE COMMUNIST
PARTY



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-0914

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2188 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3376

TAMPA DISTRICT OFFICE:
2130 W. MAIN STREET
TAMPA, FL 33607
(813) 871-2817

ST. PETERSBURG DISTRICT OFFICE:
136 FOURTH STREET NORTH
SUITE 201
ST. PETERSBURG, FL 33701
(727) 369-0201

castor.house.gov

August 4, 2026

Michael Stephens
Chief Executive Officer
Tampa International Airport
4100 George J. Bean Pkwy
Tampa, FL 33607

Brig. General Chip Diehl
Chair
Hillsborough County Aviation Authority
4100 George J. Bean Pkwy
Tampa, FL 33607

Re: Support for Tampa Airport TSA Security Officers and Opposition to TSA Gold+

Dear Mr. Stephens and Mr. Diehl:

I write not just as a representative, but as a member of the Tampa Bay community who deeply values the dedication and integrity of our Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) at Tampa International Airport (TPA). The proposal to privatize the workforce of over 700 TSOs and outsource passenger screening under the TSA Gold+ program will profoundly affect the lives of hundreds of families, the safety of millions of travelers and the reputation of the best airport in the country.

Every day, TPA TSOs greet and protect 70,000 passengers, neighbors, friends, and visitors assuring that each journey begins and ends with security and care. Their professionalism is not just a job requirement; it is a commitment to the well-being of our community. To replace these federal officers with a private contractor is to risk public safety, place profit above people and jeopardize the livelihoods of those who have served us faithfully, including the many veterans and long-serving officers in the TSO ranks.

I have heard directly from TPA TSOs, who have expressed their deep concern and opposition to privatization. Their sense of duty, pride and belonging cannot be replicated by a private entity. Tampa International Airport deserves world-class security, rooted in experience and dedication, not instability and uncertainty.

This proposal arrives as we approach the 25th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks—a painful reminder of what happens when airport security is left to private firms with high turnover and inconsistent training. The Transportation Security Administration and federal TSOs were created by Congress after 9/11 to prevent another terrorist attack and ensure that our airports would never again be vulnerable to such tragedy. To weaken aviation security now is to forget the lessons learned at great cost and the recommendations of the 9/11 Commission.

Privatization threatens not only security but also the economic stability of hundreds of Tampa Bay area families. TSOs face the loss of federal retirement benefits, health coverage and accrued vacation time. Even if offered comparable salaries initially, there is no guarantee of long-term financial security. At a time when inflation and living costs are high, this change would bring hardship to those who have given so much to our community.

TPA TSOs have shown unwavering dedication, maintaining low call-out rates during government shutdowns and high service standards. Their commitment has been inspiring. To discharge them now under TSA Gold+ would be a betrayal of trust and gratitude.

I understand that TSA proposes to allow TSA Gold+ contractors to ease deployment of screening technology. While modern screening technology is important, Congress already has provided TSA with increased funding to deploy these advancements. There is no need to risk taxpayer dollars or passenger data by handing over control to a private contractor whose primary motivation is profit, not public safety. The risks of data breaches and misuse are simply unacceptable.

Private contractors may cut corners on training, wages and benefits, leading to fatigue and reduced vigilance. Unlike federal officers, whose mission is public safety, contractors' financial incentives may conflict with the imperative to protect lives. TPA TSOs should not be defunded.

For all of these reasons, I implore you to reject the change to TSA Gold+. Let us honor the memory of the Americans lost and injured on 9/11 by upholding the commitment to vigilance and security that has

kept us safe for a quarter-century. Let's also stand with our TSOs, local families, and our community.
Thank you.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact my Legislative Assistant, Capreece Kelsaw, at Capreece.Kelsaw@mail.house.gov. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Kathy" and last name "Castor" clearly legible.

Kathy Castor

United States Representative

Florida – District 14

Cc: Gary W. Harrod, Vice Chair, Hillsborough County Aviation Authority Board of Directors
Robert I. Watkins, Treasurer, Hillsborough County Aviation Authority Board of Directors
Mayor Jane Castor, Secretary, Hillsborough County Aviation Authority Board of Directors
Commissioner Harry Cohen, Assistant Secretary/Assistant Treasurer, Hillsborough County
Aviation Authority Board of Directors
Ha Nguyen McNeill, Senior Official Performing the Duties of the Administrator, Transportation
Security Administration
Markwayne Mullin, Secretary, Department of Homeland Security