

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March __, 2013

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

Dear Administrator Pistole:

We write to express our serious concerns and urge your withdrawal of the recently announced policy to permit passengers to bring knives and certain sporting equipment in the aircraft cabin.

On September 11, 2001, hijackers on board United 93, United 175, American 77, and American 11 took over these planes using mace, box cutters and knives to attack passengers and crew. While the federal authority responsible for aviation safety and security at the time, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), did not expressly prohibit knives with blades shorter than 4 inches in length, the checkpoint operations guide, developed by the airlines in consultation with the FAA, explicitly permitted them.^[1] After these deadly terrorist attacks of 9/11, all knives and dangerous sporting equipment, like pool cues, were placed on a list of prohibited items and banned from planes.

After 9/11, Congress acted and passed the *Aviation Transportation Security Act* (ATSA), which established TSA and provided a screening workforce of federal employees responsible for passenger safety and baggage security. In 2004, Congress passed the *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004* (P.L. 108-458), which granted TSA's Administrator the authority to modify the list of items that would be prohibited from planes.^[2]

Congress acted swiftly to ensure that TSA was afforded the resources and authority to ensure a secure aviation system for the American flying public. We strongly believe that the prohibition of dangerous items is an integral layer in the safety of our aviation system.

While we support efforts to move toward a risk-based approach to security screening which will allow Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) to focus their attention on searching for items that may cause catastrophic damage to an aircraft, the TSA's recent change in policy seems unlikely to produce significant efficiencies at airport security. On the contrary, compliance with this new policy would require TSOs to inspect each knife that passes through a checkpoint to ensure that it does not exceed the size limits. Such an exercise seems likely to cause more delays than the current policy that bars all knives.

Additionally, the rationale that this policy change will help conform the list of prohibited items used in the United States to similar lists used in other countries is not persuasive. As a practical matter, international travel requires that one navigate various rules and regulations regarding the permissibility of a variety of commercial items. A lack of standardized uniformity in such rules is not a novel or surprising concept to an international traveler.

Further, while our government should attempt to facilitate international travel, its primary responsibility of assuring the safety of the passengers and crew of domestic travelers cannot be diminished. And, decisions about measures that may reduce safety must be made with all interested stakeholders.

TSA's decision appears to have been reached without any formal engagement with stakeholders impacted by this policy, including our frontline workers aboard flights, the crewmembers. A failure to engage all relevant stakeholders is unfortunate, in light of existing processes and mechanisms in place to garner input from frontline workers, such as the Aviation Security Advisory Committee (ASAC), which has played a critical role in the development of security policies and protocols, such as the Final Rule on Air Cargo Security.

The Coalition of Flight Attendant Unions, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, and the Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations oppose TSA's policy change and do not believe that policies that promote standards of safety and security should be relaxed. The concerns of these groups, composed of aviation sector employees who will be directly impacted by this policy, as well as other aviation sector stakeholders, should be heard through the existing ASAC process prior to implementation of a policy that would permit passengers to bring knives and certain sporting equipment into the passenger compartment of a plane.

Therefore, we request that TSA maintain knives and sporting equipment on the list of prohibited items until a process of formal consultation is conducted with all stakeholders through the ASAC.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

[\[1\]](#)The 9/11 Commission Report. Page 84.

[\[2\]](#)The *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act* of 2004 (P.L. 108-458). Section 4025. Prohibited Items List

[\[1\]](#)The 9/11 Commission Report. Page 84.

[\[2\]](#)The *Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act* of 2004 (P.L. 108-458). Section 4025. Prohibited Items List