

[head:] Transportation Security Officers a Key Link in Defending Our Security

Nearly two years after the tragic death of Gerardo Hernandez, the first Transportation Security Officer (TSO) killed in the line of duty, President Obama [signed into law](#) common-sense legislation that requires the U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA) to make sure airports and high-risk surface transportation hubs have adequate plans in place to deal with shootings or attacks.

Every day, thousands of federal TSOs play a critical role in keeping travelers and personnel safe by screening passengers and baggage at airports, mass transit systems and large public gatherings. These front-line workers are not allowed to carry weapons and have [no authority](#) to make arrests, leaving them especially vulnerable if attacks do occur.

The Gerardo Hernandez Airport Security Act is a great first step to help ensure that TSOs are adequately protected while on the job. However, more needs to be done to address other threats facing TSOs, including proposals to expand privatization of airport security screening, and the unfair and uneven treatment of TSOs under federal law.

For years, special interests and their allies on Capitol Hill have tried to advance irresponsible proposals that would privatize aviation security — a move that serves no role other than to enrich private corporations at the expense of workers and security. Lawmakers should stop trying to turn back the clock to the years prior to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. The aviation security regime that existed prior to the creation of a professional TSO workforce featured low pay, inadequate training, shoddy working conditions and high turnover rates. We can't return to those days.

While federal TSOs are often demonized for simply implementing policies set by the TSA, it's important to remember that these hardworking professionals have served our nation well, all while working during difficult times and under high-stress circumstances — and they deserve the same rights as other federal employees.

Unfortunately, because of a [loophole](#) in the Transportation Security Act and other agency issues, TSOs are denied the basic rights and protections afforded to nearly all other federal employees. Unlike many of their colleagues, TSOs do not have basic [arbitration rights](#) and are subjected to pay-for performance schemes that set inconsistent standards for compensation and performance evaluations. Thanks to staffing shortages, TSOs have been forced to miss required training sessions, report increased injury from lifting heavy bags on their own and miss rotations necessary to ensure attention to tasks. Furthermore, unlike other federal employees covered by a collective bargaining agreement, TSOs are also denied Official Time. That is, paid time off from government duties to work on behalf of union membership on issues including collaborative resolution of workplace disputes, coordination of meetings and workgroups, and negotiation and implementation of workplace conditions or new operating procedures. This makes it difficult for the 45,000-member workforce to assert what limited rights they have been granted.

Hardworking TSOs who are on the frontlines of airport safety and security deserve better than this. While the Gerardo Hernandez Airport Security Act creates a path forward for keeping TSOs and the traveling public safe in the event of emergencies, it is a law policymakers can and should expand upon. Addressing lapses in airport security policy by passing more common-sense reforms is crucial to ensuring

that our nation's 45,000 TSOs have the support and resources they need to perform their duties and keep our country safe.