

San Francisco Living Wage Coalition

MEMO

TO: Federal Aviation Administration
FROM: Ken Jacobs, Karl Kramer
RE: Proposed Rule on Certification of Screening Companies
DATE: May 2, 2000

The San Francisco Living Wage Coalition brings together more than one hundred labor unions, community organizations and religious leaders in San Francisco. Members of the Living Wage Coalition include the San Francisco Labor Council, public and private sector unions and sixty-five religious leaders.

We have been working for the last two years to improve wages and benefits for low-wage workers in San Francisco. The situation of airport workers and the impact of low-wages on security was an early concern for us.

The GAO report and the testimony at the recent congressional hearings highlighted the problem of high turnover of security screeners for safety and security. Our experience working with baggage screeners at the San Francisco International Airport for the last year bears out these concerns. Until the introduction of the Quality Standards Program at SFO this April, baggage screeners were earning \$6.25 an hour. Screeners would stay with the job for as little as six to eight weeks, before leaving to take jobs that pay as little as 20¢ more.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition a single person working 40 hours a week needs to earn \$17.40 in the San Francisco Bay Area to cover the cost of rent and other basic necessities. At minimum wage, they would need to work 138 hours a week to make ends meet.

Working multiple jobs is extremely common for baggage screeners and other low-wage workers at the Airport. Baggage screeners have repeatedly raised concerns to us about the impact on alertness and judgement from the exhaustion of working a double shift.

Baggage screener Raphael Pendon, 61, told his story to the local press:

I start work as a screener for ITS at 9:00 pm. My shift ends at 6:00 am. I change and eat breakfast. At 7:00 am I start a second airport security job. At 3:30 pm I leave for home. I arrive home at 4:30, eat dinner, see my family, get a few hours sleep and wake up at 7:30 pm and start over.

Since the introduction of the Quality Standards Program, the Airport has already reported a decrease in turnover for baggage screeners. Workers have informed us of their plans to reduce the numbers of hours they work. The program sets minimum training, compensation and oversight standards for all workers with security access at SFO. By reducing worker turnover and making it possible for workers to live without a second full-time job, the Quality Standards Program is having a positive effect on safety and security at SFO.

Raising workers wages is an extremely cost effective means of improving security. The cost to business of the San Francisco Quality Standards works out to less than \$.30 a passenger.

We applaud the efforts by the FAA to set national standards for baggage screening companies. We believe, however, that these standards should serve as a floor, not a ceiling for local airports. We urge the FAA to state *explicitly* in your regulations that nothing in those regulations preempts the right of local airports to set wage and benefit standards for workers performing security functions in order to improve airport security. While the cost of living variation makes it impossible to set a single wage standard across the country, the FAA should encourage local airports to set such standards based on the local cost of living.

It would be a bitter irony if the San Francisco Quality Standards Program could be challenged in court on the grounds of federal preemption by the new FAA regulations. Such a challenge would not serve security at SFO nor the mission of the FAA. Given the results of past legal challenges by baggage screening companies to local regulations, we do not believe this is an idle fear.

Thank you for your consideration.