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August 25, 2006

Joan L. Headley, MS  
Post-Polio Health International (PHI)  
4207 Lindell Blvd., #110  
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Dear Joan,

This letter concerns an incident that I encountered at the San Francisco International Airport on Sunday, August 6, 2006 as I attempted to return home to Philadelphia.

I understand fully the difficult job of keeping our skies safe. I have always cooperated and will always cooperate fully with airport Police, security and airline personnel. We all want to be safe while traveling but we each need to be treated fairly and with respect. With that said, the airport security system that The Department of Homeland Security has set in place since 9/11 is inconsistent at best. The rules seem to change daily, and they vary greatly from airport to airport. I am an average American and a law abiding citizen of the United States. I have never been arrested nor have never been convicted of a crime. I am married and have a son. I own a home. I pay my taxes. My husband is a former Captain in the United States Marine Corps. We do not deserve the treatment recently rendered to us by TSA personnel at the San Francisco International Airport!

I am a polio survivor and have been paralyzed since childhood which requires me to wear two long leg braces (Kafos), walk with the aid of forearm crutches and always use a manual wheelchair whenever I travel. On Wednesday, August 2, 2006, I flew from Philadelphia to San Francisco on USAir with my husband and three (3) other couples on a business related trip which was arranged through Allstate Insurance Company, my husband's employer. When I went through the security checkpoint in Philadelphia a female screener took me aside to manually do a body "pat-down" inspection and also checked my wheelchair. No problem whatsoever! This examination took less than fifteen minutes and there was no problem. This is routine procedure for me whenever I travel; I accept this. The screener couldn't have been more polite and was very professional. I was treated in a dignified and professional manner and was cleared to proceed to the gate for our departure to San Francisco all in a timely manner.

After our business in San Francisco was completed, we all arrived together by limousine at the San Francisco Airport approximately one hour prior to the departure time of 10:30 a.m. for our five hour flight home to Philadelphia. This is when the nightmare began. At the security checkpoint I was taken aside and told to wait for a female security screener. My crutches and other personal belongings had been taken from me and given to my husband, Bill, to go through the metal detector separately. After being cleared, they were then brought over to a table where I was waiting. Again....all routine procedure and one I've come to accept and co-operate with fully. After cooperating fully with a **very thorough and complete full body "pat-down" inspection** by a female TSA security screener another one was called over to assist. For some reason I was told that they could not "clear" me to fly, nor would they "clear" my wheelchair. When asked why, I was given no reason. They wouldn't tell me why. This wasn't making any sense especially after coming through the Philadelphia security checkpoint just days before with absolutely no problem at all! I was then expected to submit to further inspection and examination of my legs and braces, but in order for me to do this I would have to drop my pants! The screeners said that to insure my privacy they would hold a sheet up to prevent onlookers from seeing what was going on! It was at this point I refused. I cannot physically stand and drop my pants while maintaining my precarious balance. Never mind the absurdity of disrobing in the terminal behind a sheet! This was definitely taking their authority to an unnecessary extreme and was not acceptable. I refused to be strip searched! I raised

both my pant legs while seated in my wheelchair to reveal the braces I wear on my legs and explained that they continue up each leg to my thigh which they had already felt during the initial "pat-down" search. Apparently this still was not good enough and they would still not "clear" me to fly. I then offered to get up out of the wheelchair so they could do whatever it was they needed to do to "clear" my wheelchair, but to do this I needed my crutches in order to perform this miracle. When I reached to take my crutches off the table, (remember they had already been cleared) the TSA security screener grabbed them from me and threatened to have me arrested for assault! I freely admit that when the screener grabbed my crutches away from me I struggled momentarily with her because I was so upset and those crutches represent my mobility. Subsequently, I sustained a bruise on my arm and trauma to my shoulder from this exchange which has been documented by my physician along with photos. The TSA security officers would not allow me to have my crutches or my handbag because I hadn't been "cleared" yet.

It was at this time that I was told I could not fly that day! My husband then asked if we were expected to rent a car and drive to Philadelphia. The senior TSA person at San Francisco told us that it might be an alternative solution. My husband, Bill, then asked her if she had the authority to make a common sense decision to clear me to fly. The TSA administrator replied that she had **NO authority** whatsoever to make any common sense decision.

I needed to use the bathroom before our long flight home, but they refused to allow me to do this until I was cleared. This was getting out of control. This was ridiculous! This was harassment! This was unbelievable! This was discrimination! By the time this horrific ordeal was over I was swelling with outrage and in tears. I had been treated like I was some criminal. Ultimately, if I wanted to be "cleared" to board that airplane for our scheduled flight back home to Philadelphia, I had no choice but to submit to the humiliating and demeaning strip search inspection by yet two more female security officers. At this point they reluctantly agreed to allow the search to be conducted in an adjoining ladies room. I then had to ask for permission to use the bathroom. This was the most humiliating experience I have ever encountered. This is how "the TSA trains their Security Officers to conduct effective, safe, comfortable, dignified, and respectful screening at all checkpoints."

My point in documenting this incident is not to protest the fact that it will take longer to "clear" me any time I fly. My dilemma is that I am not sure I will be cleared to fly at all at the time and date of any scheduled departure. TSA must inform me of exactly what I need to do to be able to fly. To have to conform to a higher standard of security just because I have a disability is clearly a violation of my civil rights. I would be happy to get a doctors certificate, have photos of my braces or do anything reasonable to avoid this situation again . I just need some sort of clarification!

As a U.S. Citizen I fully expect that some clarification of this situation be forthcoming. Unfortunately my expectation is that TSA will not show any improvement in the treatment afforded those who might present a special situation when attempting to navigate the security maze at our airports.

Sincerely,



Diane Kirilin Murphy

cc: TSA Office of Privacy Policy & Compliance  
TSA Office of Civil Rights & Liberties  
National Council on Disability