

**U.S. Department of  
Homeland Security**

Office of Civil Rights and  
Liberties  
601 South 12<sup>th</sup> Street  
Arlington, VA 22202-4220



**Transportation  
Security  
Administration**

September 29, 2006

Mrs. Diane K. Murphy  
414 Glenway Road  
Erdenheim, PA 19038

Dear Mrs. Murphy:

Thank you for your letter of August 21, 2006, concerning the difficulties you experienced at the San Francisco International Airport (SFO) security screening checkpoint on August 6, 2006. The Department of Homeland Security has forwarded your letter to the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) Office of Disability Programs for reply.

At the outset, please accept my most sincere and deepest apology for the insensitivity, embarrassment, humiliation, and inconvenience you experienced during the screening process at the SFO security checkpoint. One of the primary goals of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is to provide the highest level of security and customer service to all who pass through our screening checkpoints. Our current policies and procedures focus on ensuring that all passengers, regardless of their personal situations and needs, are treated equally and with the dignity, respect, and courtesy they deserve. Although every person and item must be screened before entering each sterile area, it is the manner in which the screening is conducted that is most important. All our Transportation Security Officers (TSO) are required to be courteous and respectful during the process, and are trained to explain what they are doing and what will happen next in the process.

In order to achieve that goal, in March 2002, TSA established a program for screening of persons with disabilities and their associated equipment, mobility aids, and devices. Our program covers all categories of disabilities (mobility, hearing, visual, and hidden). As part of that program, we established a coalition of over 60 disability-related groups and organizations to help us understand the concerns of persons with disabilities and medical conditions.

An investigation of this incident with TSO management at SFO revealed that the TSOs at SFO applied the wrong procedure, explosive trace detection (ETD) sampling, to your metal leg braces. ETD sampling is required for support braces, but not for support appliances. Whenever a person wearing a support appliance alarms the walk-through metal detector (WTMD), the person must undergo additional screening. The TSO should inform the passenger that his or her support appliance must be visually and physically inspected. The visual inspection should be conducted on the exterior accessible area of the support appliance, the areas that can be accessed by the person lifting his or her pant leg, shirt sleeve, or by raising a skirt to knee-level. If no area

can be accessed on the support appliance (i.e. pant leg too tight) a limited pat-down will be conducted to ensure that no prohibited items are being concealed around the area of the support appliance. At no time during the process, should you be required to remove your support brace for additional screening, nor remove your clothing.

When a passenger using a wheelchair arrives at the checkpoint, TSOs are taught to inspect the passenger, the wheelchair, carry-on bags and all other accessible property using established protocols. The exact screening procedure depends on whether the individual can stand and walk, only stand or not stand at all. Passengers who must remain in their wheelchairs are screened via pat-down inspection. The pat-down typically involves asking the individual to lift his/her arms and legs (if possible) and to remove his/her shoes for x-ray screening (if possible). Again, at no time should the passenger be required to remove clothing or their support appliance during this process. TSOs are taught to offer a private screening for the pat-down inspection, but a private screening is entirely voluntary. The passenger also may request it at any time during the screening process. A companion or assistant may accompany the passenger to the private screening after he/she clears screening to provide assistance.

If the passenger can stand, the TSO will use the hand-held metal detector to wand him or her, providing assistance by offering a hand, arm, or shoulder to lean on. The wheelchair is screened separately through a physical and visual inspection. After the passenger, the wheelchair and all other accessible property (including mobility aids and devices) have been screened and cleared, the TSO will return the items to the passenger, helping him or her back into the wheelchair as needed. Except in extraordinary circumstances, a TSO of the same sex will conduct the pat-down.

Whenever appropriate, TSOs also must offer the passenger assistance in performing any tasks needed to complete the screening process. Under no circumstances should a passenger be forced to perform actions that cause pain or put him or her at risk of injury. TSOs are instructed to listen and respond appropriately to input a passenger offers concerning his/her physical limitations. They should offer an arm or shoulder to lean on when needed, and provide any assistance (i.e., a chair to sit in) requested by a passenger to facilitate the screening process. For example, passengers whose weakness or balance problems put them at risk of falling should be offered a chair to sit in during screening. Passengers who, like you, have difficulty with balance, standing, or walking also may decline metal detector screening, and ask instead for a full pat-down screening while they are seated.

Walkers, crutches, and canes that can fit through the x-ray machine must undergo x-ray screening. TSOs are taught to offer passengers assistance when asking them to relinquish their aids for x-ray screening, and to reunite them with their mobility aid as soon as possible when screening is completed. TSOs should have allowed you to have your cane once it had cleared to assist you during the screening process; however, other accessible property, such as your handbag, cannot be given back to you until you have fully cleared the screening process. If a passenger has any contact with their accessible property before they are cleared, they and their property must be rescreened.

Regarding withdrawing from the screening process to use the restroom, once a passenger enters the screening process, they cannot exit from the process until screening is complete. We recommend that passengers use the restroom in the public area prior to entering the screening process or after completing the process beyond the security checkpoint.

TSA is unable to use medical documentation or identification cards to exempt a person from screening or to reduce screening procedures for persons with disabilities and medical conditions due to limited resources, competing priorities, and operational considerations. Some of these considerations include increasing TSO workload in order to review the IDs, which also would require them to be away from their screening duties for lengthy periods of time. Their attention would be diverted from preventing prohibited items from penetrating the sterile area and boarding aircraft. Furthermore, ID cards could easily be forged, duplicated, or altered.

As stated on our website, a passenger may present to the TSO medical documentation or IDs with information regarding his/her medical condition that may be helpful during the screening process. This documentation is not required and does not exempt a passenger from the screening process.

I am forwarding copies of your letter and this response to the Federal Security Director (FSD) at SFO with a request that refresher training be conducted to ensure that TSO are aware of and correctly applying the procedures for passengers with disabilities.

For more information on the screening process geared to people with disabilities and medical conditions, we recommend that you visit our tips for "Travelers with Disabilities & Medical Conditions," located on our website at <http://www.tsa.gov> under "Our Travelers." These tips are updated periodically.

Also, enclosed is our new Z-Card pocket guide to assist passengers with preparing for their trip and to inform them about the screening process. This new guide will be disseminated in the near future at airport ticket counters and security checkpoints and through travel agencies and the TSA disability coalition. This guide provides a comprehensive overview of how TSA addresses the concerns of persons with disabilities in the screening process.

Thank you for sharing your concerns with us and being part of our improvement process. Feedback from citizens like you helps us identify needed changes, correct problems, and make the process more appropriate and effective for passengers with differing needs.

Sincerely yours,



Sandra Cammaroto  
Division Manager  
Disability Programs Division  
Office of Civil Rights and Liberties

Enclosure

cc: FSD, SFO