



Highlights of [GAO-07-299](#), a report to congressional committees

## AVIATION SECURITY

# TSA's Staffing Allocation Model Is Useful for Allocating Staff among Airports, but Its Assumptions Should Be Systematically Reassessed

### Why GAO Did This Study

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has identified the transportation security officer (TSO) workforce as its most important asset in securing commercial aviation. TSOs screen passengers and baggage to prevent dangerous items onboard aircraft. In response to an Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 requirement to develop standards for TSO staffing, TSA developed a staffing model to guide its TSO allocations across airports. The act also required GAO to analyze TSA's staffing standards.

GAO analyzed (1) how TSA ensures its model provides a sufficient TSO staff to perform screening and (2) how TSA deploys its TSOs and factors that affect deployment. GAO analyzed data and reviewed documentation about the model and discussed it with TSA headquarters officials and TSA officials at 14 airports.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) direct the Assistant Secretary for Transportation Security to (1) establish a mechanism to ensure periodic assessment of model assumptions and (2) establish a policy for when TSOs can be used to provide operational support. DHS reviewed a draft of this report and concurred with GAO's findings and recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-299](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-299).

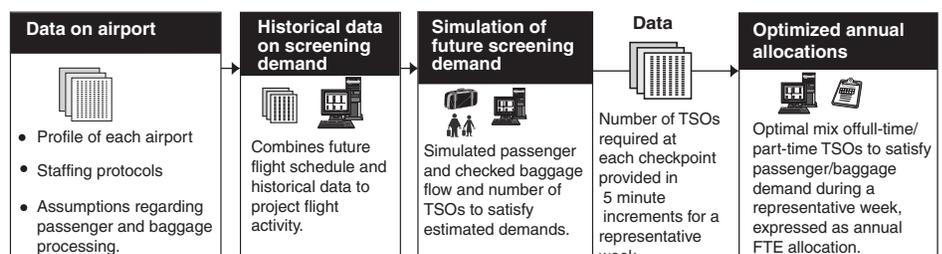
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Brian Lepore at (202) 512-4523, [leporeb@gao.gov](mailto:leporeb@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

TSA aims to ensure that its Staffing Allocation Model provides a sufficient number of TSOs to perform passenger and checked baggage screening by: (1) building assumptions into its allocation model that are designed to calculate the necessary levels of TSOs to ensure security and minimize wait times, and (2) employing multiple monitoring mechanisms for the sufficiency of the model's outputs. However, Federal Security Directors (FSD)—the ranking TSA authorities responsible for leading and coordinating security activities at airports—and our own analysis identified concerns with some of the fiscal year 2006 model assumptions. Although TSA officials said they plan an annual review of select assumptions and based changes for fiscal year 2007 on such a review of selected fiscal year 2006 assumptions, TSA does not have a mechanism for prioritizing its review and for assuring that all assumptions are periodically validated to help ensure that they reflect operating conditions. Without periodic validation, TSA risks basing its allocations on assumptions that do not reflect operating conditions. For example, TSA acknowledged that it had not assessed the assumption that its method of calculating screening demand provides sufficient surplus staff to account for time away from screening for leave, training and operational support. Some FSDs told GAO their allocations did not include sufficient surplus in fiscal year 2006. Moreover, although TSA officials stated that the fiscal year 2007 model will include an allowance for time spent on operational support duties, TSA has not determined under what circumstances it is appropriate to use TSOs to perform operational support functions or provided FSDs with guidance on when TSOs can be used this way. Without establishing such guidance, FSDs may over rely on TSOs to perform operational support functions.

TSA has vested its FSDs with responsibility for managing their TSO allocations in light of local circumstances and challenges. Nevertheless, factors outside the model's determination of overall staffing levels can affect scheduling effectiveness. For example, FSDs face scheduling challenges including injuries, absenteeism, and time spent away from primary screening duties for training and operational support. Officials described initiatives underway to address some of these issues. However, it is too soon to assess the effectiveness of these initiatives.

#### Annual TSO Allocation Process



Source: GAO analysis of TSA Staffing Allocation Model.