

TRANSPORTATION / OPINION

Airport workers need safety training

Security needs demand better preparation of Logan workers

 **LAPONDA J. FITCHPATRICK** Oct 1, 2017

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TRAVELERS HAVE AN expectation of safety and security, both in the air and during emergencies at America’s airports. Unfortunately, at many airports we are seeing that an integral group of airport workers are left out of the emergency response plans. Their inclusion could make traveler’s expectations a reality.

As one of the nation’s busiest travel hubs, Boston’s Logan Airport is no stranger to security scares. The airport has experienced its share of bomb threats, gun scares and more over the past few years. During these emergencies, the traveling public has turned to any airport worker they could find for help, including hundreds of baggage handlers, terminal cleaners, airplane cabin cleaners and wheelchair attendants.

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Exhibit 1

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Imagine how surprising it is to learn that many of Logan's airport workers do not receive standard training on what to do in case of an emergency. Subcontracted Logan Airport workers have reported to SEIU Local 32BJ, which is organizing at Logan, that the only training they have received is to "run and hide" during an emergency. In an emergency like the recent shooting at Fort Lauderdale Airport, this run-hide safety instruction for subcontracted airport workers proved unhelpful and scared passengers and workers alike.

Failure to provide emergency response training to those who touch passengers the most is a serious public safety, customer service, and risk management issue for the airline industry, Logan Airport, Massport and other businesses that employ them.



Most airport passenger service workers are employed by a network of airline subcontractors. The airlines have created a low-bid "race to the bottom" system, where airline profits have soared while subcontracted airport jobs have gone from well paying, family supporting jobs to minimum wage jobs with high turnover and little to no training or benefits. In this environment, emergency preparedness training hasn't been spared; it is just another cost that airlines can't be

bothered to pay despite the potential endangerment of workers and passengers alike.

In the critical infrastructure that is our nation's airport system, profit cannot be the only consideration for passenger service. Travelers and other airport users have an expectation of safety and security when stepping foot into an airport. Emergency response training needs to be mandated, and Massachusetts recently took a progressive step to make that happen.

The Massachusetts Senate and House of Representatives held hearings recently on a bill that could close this safety loophole at Logan Airport by providing the airport's 1,500 subcontracted workers with much needed safety and emergency response training.

Just after the anniversary of 9/11, it's clear this is more needed than ever. Along with an increase in the minimum wage, which is also the subject of pending legislation, the airport safety bill will create a more stable, well trained and experienced workforce that can better protect the public. With the majority of Logan airport workers living in the Boston area, the bill would also provide a safer working environment for hundreds of Bostonians who support their families and communities with these jobs.

The bill would be good for them – and for the millions of people who travel through Logan Airport every year.

Meet the Author

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LaPonda J. Fitchpatrick is a former captain of the Los Angeles Airport Police Department and nationally recognized aviation security and law enforcement consultant.

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