
CHAPTER 10:
THE RIGHT TO TRAVEL



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In recent years, many Americans have been disturbed by the decision of the Transportation Security Agency (TSA) to implement airport screening procedures that are far more intrusive than anything previously seen in the United States. These techniques—which often include intrusive body searches of passengers—present especially serious concerns for transgender people, who can be outed against their will only to face bias and harassment. These screening procedures can be especially traumatic for transgender children. In the National Transgender Discrimination Survey—which includes data collected before these more intrusive techniques were introduced—nearly one in five transgender travelers reported having been harassed or disrespected by airport security screeners or other airport workers.¹

In 2011, the TSA began phasing in new screening technology that replaces electronic viewing of images of passengers' unclothed bodies with automated detection of potentially hazardous objects. This technology mitigates some privacy concerns but has not changed the frequent use of intrusive pat-downs. NCTE continues to hear troubling stories from transgender travelers about their treatment by TSA, as well as by officials at U.S. border crossings. While NCTE has long worked with TSA to promote better staff training, respond to individual complaints, and educate the trans traveling public, the agency's lack of transparency and persistent use of invasive and unproven security procedures are a continuing cause for concern.

Policy Advances

- The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) updated all scanners to show only a generic body outline rather than images of passengers' actual bodies. (2013)

Needed Policy Changes

- The Transportation Security Administration should adopt more effective and less intrusive airport screening protocols that reduce the frequency of pat-downs and do not require additional screening of transgender travelers based solely on their personal characteristics, prosthetics, or clothing.
- The Transportation Security Administration should include transgender competence in its basic training curriculum for airport security screeners and other Transportation Security Officers.
- U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) should include transgender competence in its basic training curriculum for CBP agents.

See Immigration Reform for more on border enforcement and other immigration policies.

¹Injustice at Every Turn: A Report of the National Transgender Discrimination Survey, at 130, 132.