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NTEU to Charter First TSA Chapter; To Speak for 1,400 Employees at JFK

Washington, D.C.—The leader of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU)—the union that represents front-line security employees at airports across the country—announced today it is chartering its first chapter for employees of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) at one of the nation’s most important airports.

“NTEU Chapter 304 will speak for 1,400 TSA employees at John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York,” said NTEU President Colleen M. Kelley. “TSA employees need serious, effective and determined representation. These employees are charged with securing our entire air transportation network while providing customer service to the traveling public. This is a high-stress job and these employees get little support from TSA management.”

The successful organizing drive was conducted in response to requests from TSA employees at JFK who had previously organized together as the Metropolitan Airport Workers Association.

“NTEU brought its message of representation and service to these employees, and we intend to take that message to airports where we represent a large concentration of employees in the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection (CBP),” President Kelley said. “NTEU is uniquely positioned to represent TSA employees given our long history of representing other federal employees—now part of CBP—who are charged with the security of our nation and who work in every international airport in the United States.”

NTEU will be in a position to handle grievances for TSA employees at JFK on important workplace issues such as promotions, work schedules, shift bidding, hours of work—including alternative work schedules—overtime, performance appraisals, use of leave and more.

The union also, Kelley said, will provide employees with representation before the TSA Disciplinary Review Board; assist in filing complaints with the TSA Office of Inspector General; and give TSA employees a strong, unified voice in the workplace.

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NTEU to Charter Initial TSA Chapter at JFK—Add One

Most immediately, she said, NTEU will fight to change the employees' pay-for-performance system, under which only 2 percent of employees received an 'outstanding' rating, and only 20 percent received a rating of 'exceeds' expectations. "Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) are a key link in the nation's security," Kelley said, "and they must be appropriately rewarded for the efforts and contributions they make every day."

Other issues that will draw NTEU's immediate attention, she said, involve safety and health, scheduling and work assignments, the need to improve inadequate training programs, and the high cost of parking for JFK screeners.

In contrast to private sector screeners at a small number of airports, TSOs do not have collective bargaining rights. NTEU is pressing for approval of legislation that would provide TSA employees the same collective bargaining rights as other employees of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). NTEU already represents a majority of employees in DHS's Bureau of Customs and Border Protection.

TSA was created in late 2001 and the head of TSA was granted authority to determine whether TSA employees would be granted collective bargaining rights; these rights were not granted.

Pending House and Senate legislation that would enact the remaining recommendations of the 9/11 Commission would provide for TSA collective bargaining rights. The measure is strongly supported by NTEU.

TSA's own official guidance on unionization, issued in December 2005, tells employees that they may join unions and engage in union activity without fear of retaliation or discrimination—and pointedly said it is "every manager's and supervisor's responsibility to protect that right."

As the largest independent federal union, NTEU represents some 150,000 employees in 31 agencies and departments, including nearly 15,000 in CBP. NTEU is awaiting certification by the Federal Labor Relations Authority of its resounding victory of last June in an election to represent the entire CBP bargaining unit.