



March 24, 2026

The Honorable Andrew Garbarino
Chairman
House Committee on Homeland Security
H2-176 Ford House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
House Committee on Homeland Security
H2-117 Ford House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Re: Committee Hearing, entitled, "Funding Lapse and Security Gaps: Assessing the Harmful Impacts of the DHS Shutdown on Americans"

Dear Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the American Society of Travel Advisors (ASTA) and the more than 310,000 individuals working in the travel advisor profession, thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the record regarding the ongoing Department of Homeland Security (DHS) shutdown and its growing impact on the traveling public, travel advisors, and the broader U.S. travel economy.

Travel advisors play a central and indispensable role in the global travel and tourism industry and are essential drivers of economic activity in every congressional district. ASTA's membership encompasses the full breadth of the marketplace from home-based entrepreneurs and traditional brick-and-mortar agencies to large travel management companies (TMCs) and online travel agencies. These professionals provide critical services to the traveling public, offering informed guidance, real-time problem solving, and dedicated assistance in the event of emergencies, disruptions, or unexpected changes in plans. Corporations rely on TMCs to manage their business travel programs efficiently and effectively, ensuring policy compliance and cost control while maintaining traveler safety and satisfaction.

As nearly two-thirds of travel advisors operate as independent contractors, the profession represents a significant segment of the U.S. small business community. Ninety-five percent of travel agencies qualify as small businesses under the SBA standard, and 80 percent are women-owned. In 2024, travel agencies sold an average of 781,000 air tickets per day, totaling \$99.2 billion in annual airline sales, and were responsible for booking more than 66 percent of all cruises and tour packages. The profession booked \$119.3 billion in 2024 alone, with continued industry growth projected by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Given this scale and economic impact, understanding the challenges faced by travel advisors during the current DHS shutdown is essential to fully evaluating its effect on their businesses, U.S. travelers, and the broader travel economy. Unsurprisingly, the shutdown introduced

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significant instability into the nation's travel infrastructure, particularly within the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) systems that travelers rely upon daily. While Congress continues deliberations on funding DHS, the effects of this disruption are already being felt across the travel ecosystem.

Conditions at U.S. airports illustrate the severity of the situation. TSA, which employs roughly 50,000–60,000 frontline officers, has been operating with significantly fewer staff due to increased absenteeism and retirements as a result of the shutdown. Hundreds of TSA officers have resigned their positions during the shutdown, and absentee rates at certain airports have reached as high as 50 percent, forcing the closure of screening lanes and, in some cases, entire checkpoints. At major airport hubs, this has resulted in security wait times far beyond normal expectations, with reports of delays exceeding three to five hours in cities such as Atlanta and Houston, and routine waits of two to three hours in other large airports. Travelers are now being advised to arrive at airports three to four hours early, even for domestic flights, underscoring the magnitude of operational strain. The result is an unpredictable and often chaotic airport environment that is eroding traveler confidence and raising concerns about both efficiency and long-term system resilience.

ASTA's nationwide travel sentiment survey of more than 700 travel advisors, conducted in March 2026, confirms that these operational challenges are having a direct and measurable impact on the industry. Over 60 percent of advisors report that geopolitical instability and government-related disruptions are significantly affecting itinerary planning and client confidence. At the same time, more than one in five advisors report that they lack sufficient information to confidently advise clients on regulatory and operational changes, highlighting a persistent communication gap between federal agencies and the professionals responsible for guiding travelers.

The consequences for travel advisors, who again are overwhelmingly small business owners, are substantial. As observed during prior shutdowns, advisors are experiencing increased workloads tied to rebooking, itinerary adjustments, and client reassurance, often without additional compensation. Survey responses indicate that clients are delaying or canceling travel plans due to uncertainty surrounding TSA operations, airport wait times, and broader concerns about system reliability. Advisors consistently report that they are forgoing revenue-generating activity, instead spending significantly more time managing disruption-related concerns, placing additional financial strain on an industry that relies heavily on commission-based income.

A particularly acute concern raised by both advisors and travelers is the disruption to trusted traveler programs such as Global Entry and TSA PreCheck. Many travelers have paid fees to participate in these programs with the expectation of expedited screening and processing, yet the current environment has reduced their effectiveness or created uncertainty around their



availability. This not only frustrates travelers but also undermines programs specifically designed to enhance efficiency and reduce congestion at screening checkpoints.

Beyond the immediate operational impacts, the broader economic consequences are equally concerning. Travel advisors report a measurable decline in bookings, particularly for international travel, as travelers adopt a “wait-and-see” approach. Missed connections, extended layovers, and unpredictable processing times are creating ripple effects across airlines, hotels, cruise lines, and destinations that depend on consistent travel demand. These domestic disruptions are compounded by growing concerns among international travelers regarding entry procedures, processing delays, and overall travel experience in the United States.

Equally troubling has been the lack of consistent, reliable communication from federal agencies during the shutdown. Advisors report that rapidly changing conditions, combined with limited official guidance, are making it increasingly difficult to provide accurate, real-time information to clients. In many cases, advisors are forced to rely on fragmented or anecdotal information, which further contributes to traveler anxiety and hesitancy to book. Taken together, these factors point to a clear conclusion: the current DHS shutdown is not merely a temporary administrative disruption, but a systemic shock to the travel industry that is affecting consumer behavior, small business viability, and the overall perception of the United States as a reliable destination for travel.

In light of these findings, ASTA respectfully urges Congress to take immediate steps to restore stable and predictable funding for DHS operations that directly impact travel, including TSA and CBP. It is critical that trusted traveler programs be protected from future shutdown-related disruptions, particularly given their fee-based funding structure and essential role in sustaining system efficiency. In addition, improved communication from DHS and TSA to industry stakeholders is critical. Travel advisors serve on the front lines of customer engagement and are essential partners in disseminating accurate, timely information to millions of travelers. Establishing clear and consistent communication channels would significantly enhance the industry’s ability to manage disruptions and maintain consumer trust.

We also urge policymakers to recognize travel advisors as key stakeholders in discussions related to aviation policy, shutdown contingency planning, and traveler protection initiatives. Their firsthand experience and direct engagement with consumers can provide valuable insights into how policy decisions affect real-world travel experiences. Finally, Congress should consider long-term policy solutions that insulate critical travel infrastructure from future funding lapses, recognizing the essential role these systems play in supporting both national security and economic activity.

While travel advisors continue to provide essential support and guidance to travelers during this period of uncertainty, the challenges created by the DHS shutdown are placing unnecessary



strain on both the industry and the traveling public. Travel should not become collateral damage in broader policy disputes. Stability, predictability, and confidence in the U.S. travel system are essential to maintaining economic growth and ensuring a positive travel experience for millions of Americans and international visitors alike. While advisors continue to demonstrate resilience and professionalism under challenging circumstances, the ongoing disruption underscores the critical importance of a stable and well-functioning federal travel infrastructure. Restoring funding to permit DHS operations and avoiding future disruptions is essential not only for the travel industry but for the broader U.S. economy.

We appreciate your attention to these concerns and stand ready to work with Congress to support solutions that strengthen the U.S. travel system and protect the businesses and travelers who depend on it.

Sincerely,

Zane Kerby
President and CEO
American Society of Travel Advisors