

PRESS RELEASE  
For Immediate Release  
April 27, 2017



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## **A Unified Airport Police Structure Keeps Travelers Safe**

It's time to stop adding confusion to police response at airports by haphazardly throwing non-airport-specific police into major airports to "support" our mission.

Let's start with the facts: Basic education and training is an important foundation for all police officers. AAPO airport police graduate from law enforcement academies and are certified officers in their jurisdictions. Then, like all highly specialized police units, including gang, undercover, narcotics, K-9 and SWAT officers, airport police receive aviation-specific training, as well as airport-specific training for their airports of jurisdiction.

The airports patrolled by members of AAPO are among the most complex, well-traveled criminal- and terrorist-targeted areas in the United States. Airport police receive training on how to handle hijackers, gunmen and bomb detection in airport environments that are larger than some cities and multidimensional in travelers, employees and agencies, including CBP, FBI and TSA. However, recent trends to increase police presence by adding local or state police troopers (most from agencies that are understaffed themselves) have contributed to confusion, a lack of a singular incident command, and chaos in responding to serious threats to airport security.

For example, an LAX airport-commissioned After-Action Report on the November 2012 shooting at LAX revealed a dangerously disjointed split policing model at the airport in which, post-apprehension of the shooter, three chains of command — including one by the Airport Police and one by the local police agency, the LAPD — were established, contributing to massive confusion and an ineffective response, and placing lives at risk. This lack of a unified response, with different chains of command, indisputably proved to be ineffective and unsafe at LAX.

Another example was a false active-shooter report at JFK International Airport's Terminal 8 on August 14, 2016. During that incident, the Port Authority Police Department (PAPD), the local law enforcement authority at JFK Airport, responded; entered and confirmed there was no active shooter, victims or evidence of either; and conveyed that information within three minutes of the original notifications. Trained PAPD officers established an on-scene incident command post while a central incident command center was opened at the airport police station. Unfortunately, most of the mutual-aid responding agencies disregarded the protocols put in place for such an incident, which called for all responding agencies to report to the central incident command center and report to the PAPD incident commander for assignment. This disregard of well-established and trained-on protocols by responding agencies not familiar with the airport added greatly to the confusion and ensuing panic.

"Airport police are trained and prepared to respond to all interruptions to airport operations, from hijackings to terrorism — this is what we train and continually retrain for," said Marshall McClain, president of the Los Angeles Airport Peace Officers Association and co-founder of AAPO. "Efforts to place outside police forces at airports are disruptive to the security apparatus of an airport, as oftentimes airport police are not made aware of where additional forces are placed and when, which creates a dangerous security risk."

"Putting police at airports who aren't trained there and aren't part of the command structure to support political goals, not safety and security, does no one any good. Airports are not the place to experiment by throwing cops in a mix who have never trained together and expect things to work out OK when something big happens," said Paul Nunziato, president of the Port Authority Police Benevolent Association and co-founder of AAPO. "You do not see two disparate police forces patrolling the same block in a city, so why would you have

two police forces patrolling in an airport? Airports move thousands of people in confined spaces every day — mix this with two police forces that report to two different chains of command, and you have a potential recipe for disaster.”

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*The American Alliance of Airport Police Officers (AAPO) is composed of rank-and-file airport police officers (including many dual police/aircraft rescue firefighters) who stand as the first line of defense against terrorist attacks, hijackings and other criminal activity at our nation's airports. We seek to promote security and safety for the traveling public, visitors and airport employees by highlighting best practices and identifying areas for improvement and proposed solutions for our nation's airport security deployment. AAPO focuses on regulatory issues that promote our efforts to provide the most advanced and cutting-edge service innovations and security processes in our nation and the world. Our organization represents thousands of sworn law enforcement officers across the United States beholden only to this mission. We are unencumbered by neither political nor managerial constraints that would prevent us from promoting sound public safety policy.*

*The founding members of the American Alliance of Airport Police Officers are composed of numerous rank-and-file airport police officers from John F. Kennedy International Airport; LaGuardia Airport; Los Angeles International Airport; Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport; LA/Ontario International Airport; Newark Liberty International Airport; Van Nuys Airport; Stewart International Airport; and Teterboro Airport.*