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SCREENERS AT NEWARK AIRPORT VINDICATED

Twenty Two (22) Transportation Security Officers (TSOs) are back at work after efforts to fire them from Federal service failed. These Officers had been placed on Administrative Leave pending investigations and hearings. The Officers were charged with not following Standard Operating Procedure at Baggage Room B-2 at Newark Liberty Airport.

All of the Officers returned to work were members of Local 2222 of American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) and represented by Philip Taubman of Taubman, Kimelman & Soroka, LLP., an influential labor and employment law firm in New York City. (www.discriminationfighter.com).

The B-2 Baggage Room is supposed to be used to check baggage that establishes some level of threat, while cleared bags (no level of threat) are to be placed directly on the aircraft. However, cleared bags were being sent to B-2 based on image times expiring due to lack of assigned manpower, belt and/or diverter malfunctions, overlap of images when bags are too close together and Supervisors deliberately placing clear baggage to justify the bag count and number of personnel assigned to the baggage room.

Officers assigned to B-2, would identify the cleared bags by using sophisticated equipment and training known as On Screen Alarm Resolution Protocol (OSARP). Cleared bags would then be placed on the aircraft, while bags indicating threats would be opened up and subject to bomb testing analysis. In April 2012, the protocol was clarified and changed requiring all bags, cleared or not, that entered B-2 to be opened. The passengers or their baggage were never at risk during the procedure. It was clear the Senior Management was aware of the procedure that was being used at Newark Airport. However, during a TSA investigation of the baggage rooms regarding an unrelated matter, the fact that all bags were not be opened was brought to the attention of Newark Management which became the subject of this investigation and charges.

Hydrick Thomas, President of Local 2222, stated “ instead of Management coming clean and simply correcting the problem, they chose to throw the Officers under the bus.” He thanked the efforts of Local 2222 Executive Board, Airport Vice Presidents and Shop Stewards.

Philip Taubman, Attorney for the Officers, stated “ after my office investigated this matter, examined the equipment and the protocol it became clear that the Officers were being used as scapegoats for Management’s failure to provide adequate manning in the OSARP rooms, the failure to provide the proper equipment (return belt) and the failure of Management to understand and implement the proper procedures.” He went on to say, “ the placing of excellent officers on Administrative Leave where they received pay and could not come to work was a colossal waste of the taxpayer’s money, unnecessary and both offensive to the Officers who were stigmatized and poor use of limited TSA assets.”