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U.S.

T.S.A. Defends Treatment of Transgender Air Traveler

By KATIE ROGERS SEPT. 22, 2015

The Transportation Security Administration defended its officers' treatment of a transgender woman on Tuesday, a day after she says she was harassed and held for 40 minutes while passing through security in Orlando, Fla., causing her to miss a flight.

The transgender woman, Shadi Petosky, said Tuesday in an interview that T.S.A. officers at Orlando International Airport calibrated the full-body scanner for a woman, and the device flagged what officers called an "anomaly" in the groin area. Ms. Petosky, a writer and producer who had been traveling to Minneapolis on American Airlines, said that the officers did not appear to know what to do once the scanner flagged her even though she had explained that she was transgender.

"The T.S.A. agents were kind of arguing with each other about process," she said.

One officer insisted that she be rescreened, telling her to "get back in the

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Petosky said, but instead, she said she was use her phone, while he said, she was patted

7, Mike England, said

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available information,

T.S.A. has determined that the evidence shows our officers followed T.S.A.'s strict guidelines," he wrote. "Supervisory personnel and a passenger support specialist participated in the screening to ensure guidelines were met."

Ms. Petosky said she followed T.S.A. guidelines, which say that people should travel under the "name and gender that appears on their government-issued ID," but activists say the agency still subjects transgender travelers to unwanted and invasive treatment.

Mara Keisling, the executive director of the National Center for Transgender Equality, said Tuesday that many transgender people faced no-win situations while flying: Those who do not want to go through the scanners are subjected to a lengthy private screening process, and those who opt for the scanners end up facing similar treatment if they are flagged by the devices.

"Most Americans would be totally freaked out" if they knew how invasive the process is, Ms. Keisling said.

Criticism of the screening process of transgender travelers has been reported at a number of airports across the country, including Los Angeles, Louisville, Seattle and Kennedy Airport in New York.

In July, the National Center for Transgender Equality joined a joint lawsuit against the T.S.A., claiming that the agency unlawfully instituted and expanded its use of the full-body scanning machines without allowing for public review and comment. The devices are designed to screen people who identify as the sex they were born with. Agents choose male or female based on what passengers look like, a process Ms. Petosky says is flawed.

“I’m in trouble if they push a button that doesn’t fit,” Ms. Petosky said. “Somebody saw me when I was getting into the machine and they decided to push a button.”

Gunner Scott, a 45-year-old transgender man, said he was pulled aside during a screening in 2011. He was told that he had to take his shirt off. What followed was a 25-minute discussion over whether his shirt, which covered a bra-like binder he used, would have to be taken off.

“I’m in front of everyone having to explain this,” Mr. Scott said. “Finally, they just let me go. I filed a complaint with T.S.A. and got a phone call from somebody, and nothing ever happened.” After the episode, Mr. Scott said he opted to be prescreened but was stopped again at J.F.K. in 2014 when he was questioned for 30 minutes before he was released.

In Ms. Petosky’s case, she missed her flight. She said that airline employees were delayed in responding to her requests for a boarding pass, sold and refunded her an upgrade, and at one point asked the police to remove her from the airport.

“The police said ‘no,’ ” Ms. Petosky said. “The police said, ‘Give her a boarding pass,’ and then they did.”

An airline spokesman, Ross Feinstein, said in a statement that the “airline immediately rebooked Ms. Petosky on the next available flight — at no charge — to Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport.”

Ms. Petosky was told by an American employee to request a private screening in the future, but she said that T.S.A. guidelines, which suggest that travelers request such screenings, should be more inclusive.

“That seems to imply that I’m uncomfortable or something,” she said.

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