

Transgender woman treated like 'real risk' during TSA airport search

Shadi Petosky said Orlando airport security misgendered her and detained her to perform bomb check after body scan highlighted her crotch

Ellen Brait in New York

Wednesday 23 September 2015 12.09 EDT

A transgender woman who says she was subject to a lengthy and humiliating search at Orlando airport has said TSA agents were “treating me like I was a real risk”.

Shadi Petosky, a writer and producer, told the Guardian that her crotch was highlighted on a screen following her body scan, she was continuously asked whether she was a man or a woman, she was asked to go back through the scanner with the guard identifying her as male instead of female, she was detained and left alone in a separate room, her luggage was unpacked and searched, and she was patted down twice. In addition her hands were swabbed and a bomb expert went through her belongings after a trace of explosives was detected. The entire process took approximately 40 minutes. No explosives were found.

“During the second pat-down, I just lost it and started crying,” Petosky said. “I just felt distraught that we have to go through this sort of stuff, just standing there as someone puts their hands all over my body.”

The Transportation Security Administration disputes her account.

A spokesman for the TSA, Mike England, said a review of the incident - including examination of CCTV “and other available information” - showed that “our officers followed TSA’s strict guidelines”.

“Supervisory personnel and a Passenger Support Specialist participated in the screening to ensure guidelines were met,” he said in a statement.

The TSA’s website clearly outlines the screening procedures for transgender people.

“Transgender persons should use the name and gender that appears on their government-issued ID when making flight reservations and at the security checkpoint,” the website reads. “You may ask that carry-on bags be screened in private if a bag must be opened by a TSA officer to resolve an alarm. Screening can be conducted in a private screening area with a witness or companion. You may request private screening or to speak with a supervisor at any time during the screening process.”

England said that all the agency's officers were "trained to properly screen members of the transgender community" and that the TSA took "all potential civil rights violations very seriously".

Petosky missed her initial flight because of the lengthy screening process.

She and the airline disagree on how quickly she was booked on to another flight.

"American Airlines immediately rebooked Ms Petosky on the next available flight - at no charge - to Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport (MSP) via Miami," American Airlines spokesman Ross Feinstein wrote in a statement.

But Petosky said the airline was "completely misrepresenting the situation". She said they tried to have her removed by the police after she asked multiple airline representatives for a boarding pass and began recording them with her phone.

The Orlando police airport division could not be reached for immediate comment.

Petosky said she was charged for an upgrade to first-class on the flight she wanted to take. But she did not realize she was charged until she was issued a boarding pass, which she returned and was refunded for. She ended up flying to Miami on a 9.50pm flight, before a final flight to Minneapolis on Tuesday night. The airline said she was not charged for the flight she booked.

Petosky's chronicling of the event has spurred the hashtag #TravelingWhileTrans on Twitter, where other members of the transgender community shared their own stories of discrimination or their support for Petosky.

"I don't know if I want my No 1 Google searches to be a crying photo of me and a story about my genitals, but what's happened is a lot of other transgender people are saying that they have a similar story," Petosky said. "I think it kind of highlights an ongoing problem."

More news

Topics

Florida

Transgender

Air transport

Save for later Article saved

Reuse this content