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OSC Obtains Settlements for TSA Whistleblowers in Three Involuntary Reassignment Cases

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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WASHINGTON, D.C./May 23, 2018 – The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) today announced that it has resolved three related whistleblower retaliation cases where Transportation Security Administration (TSA) supervisory employees were geographically reassigned after making disclosures related to airport operations and safety.

The settlement agreement crafted by OSC and TSA includes compensatory damages of approximately \$1 million combined for the three complainants, and returns the two complainants from Seattle, Washington and Burbank, California to comparable positions in their native Hawaii. The overall value of these settlement agreements marks an achievement for OSC and demonstrates a significant step by TSA to make the employees whole.

At the time of the reassignments, the three complainants—Sharlene Mata, Heather Callahan Chuck, and Frank Abreu—were all serving as Deputy Federal Security Directors in Hawaii, where they oversaw airport operations as part of TSA’s Office of Security Operations, the agency’s largest subcomponent. In early 2014, two complainants made disclosures to TSA leadership, including reports of mismanagement and lax airport security protocols. Shortly after, their subordinates raised concerns to TSA leadership about the efficiency and effectiveness of a regional restructuring plan. TSA faulted the complainants for poor leadership and abruptly reassigned them from their airports in Hawaii to Seattle, Los Angeles, and Burbank, respectively. Mata and Abreu, natives of Hawaii, were separated from their extended families by the involuntary moves. After several more reassignments, Callahan Chuck ultimately resigned under duress.

“OSC’s involvement required the review of thousands of pages of material, interviews with two dozen witnesses and subjects, and the congressional testimony of my predecessor before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee more than a year ago. This favorable outcome has been a long time in the making,” said **Special Counsel Henry J. Kerner**. “I am pleased that we were able to achieve favorable results for the three TSA employees who had their lives thrown into disarray and hope this outcome will encourage others to speak up when they see something that could put the public at risk.”

Since the 2014 reassignment of the complainants, TSA has discontinued its discretionary practice of widespread geographic reassignments. TSA has also created a comprehensive internal training program on whistleblower retaliation.

A printable version of this press release can be [found here](#).

The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) is an independent federal investigative and prosecutorial agency. Our basic authorities come from four federal statutes: The Civil Service Reform Act, the Whistleblower Protection Act, the Hatch Act, and the Uniformed Services Employment & Reemployment Rights Act. OSC’s primary mission is to safeguard the merit system by protecting federal employees and applicants from prohibited personnel practices, especially reprisal for whistleblowing, and to serve as a safe channel for allegations of wrongdoing. For more information, please visit our website at www.osc.gov.