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## OSC Announces 2018 Special Counsel Public Servants of the Year

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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WASHINGTON, D.C./September 17, 2018 – The U.S. Office of Special Counsel (OSC) today announced the recipients of the 2018 Special Counsel Public Servants of the Year award. They are: F. Michael Abreu, Heather Callahan Chuck, and Sharlene Mata. Each served as Deputy Federal Security Directors for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in Hawaii, where they oversaw airport operations.

In early 2014, Ms. Mata and Ms. Callahan Chuck made disclosures highlighting systemic deficiencies and lax airport security protocols that were largely dismissed by TSA leadership. In response, TSA wrongly blamed Ms. Mata and Ms. Callahan Chuck for poor leadership. When Mr. Abreu refused to give untrue information about his colleagues, TSA unfairly concluded that he was aligned with them.

Less than two weeks later, all three were punitively reassigned. Ms. Mata was involuntarily sent to Seattle; Ms. Callahan Chuck to Los Angeles; and Mr. Abreu to Burbank. Ms. Mata and Mr. Abreu, natives of Hawaii, were separated from their extended families by these involuntary moves.



[Pictured L-R: F. Michael Abreu, Heather Callahan Chuck, and Sharlene Mata accepting their awards]

“These three individuals, at tremendous personal risk, blew the whistle at TSA, knowingly placing their careers on the line by directly challenging agency leadership,” said **Special Counsel Henry J. Kerner**. “They have demonstrated strong integrity as public servants. And their persistent assertion of whistleblower protections serves as a model for all other federal employees. For their demonstrated commitment to public service and significant contributions to improving the federal government, we are proud to present Mr. Abreu, Ms. Callahan Chuck, and Ms. Mata with the awards for 2018 Special Counsel’s Public Servants of the Year.”

Unfortunately, these three were not the only individuals to suffer from involuntary directed reassignments at TSA. Thanks to whistleblowers, in late 2015 the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform launched an investigation into this practice and other challenges that whistleblowers alleged constituted a culture of retaliation. The practice of directed reassignments was ultimately suspended by TSA at the end of February 2016.

Mr. Abreu served as a police officer for 17 years before joining TSA first as a Federal Air Marshal. Before her reassignment, Ms. Callahan Chuck had worked for TSA for 13 years, the majority of her career. Ms. Mata has 24 years of federal service, working in disaster relief before joining TSA.

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*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 (USERRA). 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](http://www.osc.gov).*