

# Dear TSA: The country is not safer because you grab vaginas

By Angela T. Rye

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CNN commentator questions TSA pat-down 04:39

## Story highlights

- Angela Rye: I thought additional screening was ridiculous but I complied
- It turned into an invasive pat-down, she writes

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(*CNN*)Eventually your heart gets hardened when you hear about nightmarish scenarios with the Transportation Security Administration, or TSA. With my elite status as a TSA Precheck and a CLEAR traveler, I'd grown accustomed to breezing through the security screening process in five minutes or less.

Randomly selected for additional screening? Child, please -- not "Diamond on Delta" me. So when I was selected in a nearly completely empty Detroit Metropolitan Airport last night, I thought it was ridiculous.



Angela Rye

No problem, though! It's the third time in my life I've ever been selected and the previous two times it was pretty much uneventful. My bigger TSA drama has been them destroying the order of my packed bag when they needed to search it.

This time, it was different. I had on my floor-length Diane Von Furstenberg wrap dress from a speaking engagement and sparkly pink Uggs to brave the Detroit "hawk" (the temp was in the teens). I went confidently from the metal detector to the backscatter X-ray machine.

I asked the police officer to film this so I can send to [@TSA](#). I'm hoping my humiliation will fix the system. [#TSAVaginaMonologues](#) [pic.twitter.com/lypkkcpZCW](http://pic.twitter.com/lypkkcpZCW)

— Angela Rye! (@angela\_rye) [December 16, 2016](#)

The TSA agent told me to spread my legs. Interested to know why I needed to open my legs further than the yellow feet imprints, I inquired. What are the footprints there for, then? She insisted that my floor-length dress would stop flowing if my legs were spread that far apart. I shrugged with a "girl, I guess" kind of indifference.

What happened next was unbelievable. The backscatter machine alerted to my right Ugg boot, three areas near my vagina and I think somewhere on my back.

I didn't care about anything but one place on my body. I said in complete disbelief: "You know you aren't patting down my vagina, right? Like that's NOT happening."

She insisted she had to unless her supervisor approved otherwise. I demanded to see the supervisor who insisted the TSA agent must pat down the area. I continued to ask in disbelief: What do you think is on it? In it? You are NOT patting down my vagina!

The supervisor told me he would call his manager. He did. I repeated my protests: I have a Homeland Security background. This is a severe violation of my privacy and civil liberties. Please just let me get the scan again. I do not want my vagina patted.

The agent began to insist that it was a backhanded pat around the upper thigh. At the same time, the manager says I can go through it or be escorted out. I really weighed my options. Did I really need to get on this plane to New York? I did.

The manager grew frustrated with me. I want to take a picture of the screen, on which appeared an image outline of my body -- with three overlaid yellow boxes between my legs. They won't allow me because of security protocol. I say I have every intention to escalate this to the TSA administrator.

The supervisor had had enough. He called police to have me escorted out of the airport.

Thank God for a patient police officer who understood my fear about what was happening. I told him I fly every week and asked him [if he would at least record the pat-down on my phone](#). He agreed, while telling me he had had to get the back hand pat-down on his buttocks last week. It didn't make me feel better.

The pat-down began and was uneventful until she went down my leg, up my dress, and her hand sideways hits me right in the crack of my labia. Startled, I jump and feel a lump in my throat trying to hold back tears. What happened to the back handed pat-down?

She comes around to the front; I grow nervous and pull back a bit, afraid of the same thing happening -- and her sideways hand hits in the middle of my genitals again. I can no longer hold back the tears. The officer drops the phone to his waist. He tells me he is going to write up an incident report.

The confidence he had about the similarity between this situation and his buttocks pat-down is gone. He acknowledges I'm upset and asks for my driver's license for his report. We share shame, but for different reasons.

I initially recorded the video so I could send it to TSA to raise questions about the process and challenge the agency on whether these incidents of violation truly prevent terrorist attacks. I began to think about friends of mine who are victims of sexual assault. I worried that if they were subjected to the same kind of search it could have disastrous emotional impact.

I shared the video on social media. I shared my humiliation. I shared my feelings on Periscope after the incident, so we could have a constructive conversation about altering practices. Of course, we want America to be safe and protected but we should not violate the emotional and physical safety of our nation's citizens at the same time.

Things don't change unless we ask questions and demand answers. We do not have to do something because it's always been done -- that does not make it right.

Perhaps it's time for the TSA to invest in new equipment. It is definitely time for them to keep their hands away from vaginas.