

September 7, 2019

## Proponent Testimony for HB 186

Chairman Green, Vice Chairman McClain, and members of the House Transportation & Public Safety Committee. I appreciate this opportunity to offer testimony intended to earn your support for HB 186: a bill to allow the establishment of some basic safeguards and to more clearly define the standards of responsibility railroads should provide those whose lives depend on their safe operation.

My railroad experience spans nearly 22 years. I am a Federally Certified Locomotive Engineer, Conductor, and Remote Control Operator (RCO). I have served in many safety-focused roles in both union office and railroad carrier safety committees.

Although I am currently serving in a new role, working for the SMART Transportation Division as an Assistant to the President, I've had the chance to meet with some of you during prior sessions and discuss some of the ways railroads affect our lives. We've discussed how frequently large trains have blocked crossings in our communities, on many occasions preventing the passage of emergency responders. We've also discussed the cataclysmic events that have occurred on railroads in recent years such as the Lac-Mégantic tragedy, where a runaway train carrying crude oil was responsible for the deaths of 47 people as well as the destruction and contamination of an entire town.

Freight trains operate through our backyards, over public road crossings, along the fields where our food is grown, along our waterways, and through towns near our schools and hospitals. The railroads are embedded directly into our lives and communities.

Earlier, I mentioned those whose lives depend on the safe operation of railroads. They include the both the residents of communities who co-exist and intersect with railroads, as well as railroad employees whose livelihoods depend on finishing their tour of duty safely, so they can come back tomorrow and work another day. This is a truly vast group and the measures provided in this bill serve to increase the likelihood of each of them staying safe through the result of safe actions, environments, and practices, instead of leaving it to chance.

Railroads should make efforts to be better citizens and not block crossings in Richland and Crawford Counties for fifteen hours or just stop in the middle of Circleville leaving residents to wonder when their emergency services will be able to make it across the tracks to provide medical attention to those calling for help. This occurs across the state as a result of Wall Street applying pressure to railroads to build longer trains with no regard for those affected. Prevention and accountability of these occurrences is needed more now than ever.

Railroad yards are places where there is little room for error. Yards are often filled with tracks that are very close together, and when the tracks have rail cars in them, there is usually just enough room for a person to walk between those tracks. Also, those tracks may have rail cars rolling in to them from ahead or behind. Walking between these tracks is a regular part of the duties of railroad employees of many occupations. Now picture the environment that I just described, but dark, and with bad walking surfaces. Consider that many employees are forced to come to work at night with little notice and may be fatigued. Many employees are forced to come to work sick because of unfair attendance policies that punish employees for missing work for essential health care. Consider the fact that today's employees have been tasked with more responsibility, after less training, than ever before. Add in extreme temperatures and adverse weather conditions, such as a blizzard, and it's difficult to explain why railyards shouldn't at least have decent walkways and be properly illuminated.

On road trains, long-overdue crash-avoidance technology known as Positive Train Control (PTC) is being implemented. This and any future electronic technological advances in train safety can be added to a train staffed with two trained, professional crew members. The addition of technology does not necessitate the reduction of the train crew; nor does the retention of crew size affect the use of technology. The two do not oppose each other, but rather can be complimentary. The public deserves more when it comes to ensuring their safety, not less. They deserve everything we can give them.

I hope that I have offered both clarity and insight into the aforementioned areas of railroad safety. I am grateful for your consideration, and I thank you for the attention you have given. I am also pleased to accept any of your questions.

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SMART Transportation Division