**Proponent Testimony for HB 186**

Chairman Green and members of the House Transportation & Public Safety Committee. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to give testimony in favor of this important comprehensive piece of Railroad Safety Legislation that is HB 186, before you today.

My name is Terry L. Forson, and I am a conductor/locomotive engineer for a class 1 railroad operating in the state of Ohio for the last 20 years. A class 1 railroad runs high-speed rail (up to 60 mph for freight, 79 mph for passenger). I am a fifth-generation railroader and have personally experienced how dangerous work on the railroad can be. Case in point, on May 15, 2001, while working the Columbus to Toledo assigned freight pool, there was a train that left the Toledo yard without accompanying crew. This “runaway” train posed a risk to multiple communities across Ohio. With the assistance of my engineer, Jesse Knowlton, we were called upon to stop the runaway train before fatalities resulted. You may have seen the Hollywood dramatization of this event in the film released in 2010, entitled *Unstoppable* starring Denzel Washington and Chris Pine. If there had not been not two crew members on my train that day, we would not have been able to stop the runaway train; and, given the fact that we were also hauling hazardous materials, who knows how many deaths would have resulted from the train’s ultimate derailment?

Railroads are the number one transporters of hazardous materials in the United States. Considering the company I work for has two east-west lines that haul a rather large amount of the aforementioned materials, it is imperative for the safety of citizens of Ohio that two-man crews remain to both operate the train and respond in the event of emergency.

The railroads wish to replace hard-working railroaders with technology that could never accomplish what a person can. Here in Ohio we operate trains in lengths exceeding 10,000 ft. long, the longer the train the more stress on the equipment, from the risk of break downs with the airbrakes, and failure of parts on the cars. When repairs to the train must be made it is the responsibility of the Conductor to carry out those duties. He will evaluate the situation, making repairs if need be, or contacting the dispatcher for further assistance in order to progress the train. A train breaking down has always been an issue. Since trains are much longer than they used to be, conductors experience far more break-downs in equipment than ever before. When a computer, to be more exact, Precision-Scheduled- Railroading (PSR), takes over, maintenance and safety are compromised.

A few daily examples that the Conductor handles in which technology cannot.

* Technology cannot inspect rail cars for leaking or venting tank cars.
* Technology cannot replace the human element of smelling a brake shoe burning on a passing train that could derail further down the track.
* Technology cannot see a wheel sparking on the rail of a freight car on the train you're on or a passing one. When wheels are sparking that means a hand brake is applied or the airbrakes on that car are stuck. If that sparking wheel goes unchecked it would lead to catastrophic damage, and the only person that can fix the issue is the Conductor. The Engineer cannot relieve themselves of protecting the airbrakes on the lead locomotive.
* Technology cannot quickly assess the situation, leave the locomotive, and fix the problem with available tools. It can only contact a human to do so.

Let me illustrate how two-man crews can be more effective and reactive than computer-technology by further explaining the events of May 15, 2001 when the runaway train came to our attention.

Jesse Knowlton and I were notified that a runaway train was heading in our direction and we quickly entered a siding to avoid collision. In this circumstance, time and precision were of the essence. We tied the train we were on down quickly we tested the brakes on the train to make sure the train were leaving stayed in place. Working together, we were able to shave 20-30 minutes off of our time. A one-man crew not only would be slower, but there are dangers in doing these tasks alone. For instance, in a rush, he may not secure the train properly, the train may move, or it may roll away later. The result? Another “rollaway” like a train in Canada that destroyed half a town. You may learn more about that Canadian rollaway train in Lac-Megantic Rail Disaster which claimed 47 lives. Austen, I. (16 July 2019). “A Runaway Train Explosion Killed 47, but Deadly Cargo Still Rides the Rails.” *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/07/16/world/canada/lac-megantic-quebec-train-explosion.html>

After I observed hazmats, notified the engineer, and consulted with him, we cut away and were in motion. It would have been difficult for a one-man crew to drive in reverse at high speeds without a second crew providing eyes-on and visual hand signals to judge and close the distance as well as slow down before colliding with the runaway train. Of course, these are just simple, but powerful illustrations of the need for a minimum of two-man crews.

The railroad has continued to reduce crew size over the past century. Trains originally had 4-5 man crews, and while crew reduction was inevitable due to new technologies such as diesel engines, EOT’s and radios, it would not only be unwise, but frankly, reckless and negligent to place one person in the position of being responsible for every aspect of train operation. Not only do one-man crews put employees themselves at greater danger of injury, or predatory acts by criminals, but also seriously endanger the public.

While my testimony is brief, I would be happy to answer any further questions the committee may have for me. Thank you for your consideration.

Terry Forson