Testimony of SMART Local 1376 Legislative Representative William Jeffrey Darling before the

 Ohio House Transportation and Safety Committee

 Chairman Green, Vice Chairman McClain presiding

Chairman Green, Vice Chairman McClain, members of the Transportation and Public Safety Committee Ohio House of Representatives thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 186. House Bill 186 addresses matters of public safety in addition to railroad worker safety in Ohio.

Two Person Freight Train Crews

Not long after I hired on the Railroad, I heard it said that the Railroad rulebook is written in blood. On the night June 5, 2019 blood was shed from a Conductor on a train waiting on a signal in Columbus at an interlocking named LM Cabin (by the Spaghetti Warehouse) on their way to Cincinnati, Ohio. When the signal appeared, the train began to pull and the Engineer observed two trespassers on the train about the same time the Conductor said to stop. The Conductor went back to tell them to remove themselves and was assaulted resulting in stab wounds. In the scuffle the Conductors handheld microphone was cut from his radio. The Engineer was the one who called for help. The Columbus Police Helicopter Group circled above with the spotlight on and the injured Conductor was transported to the hospital. The area in which this event occurred is within the limits of a high urban threat area. Another problem with this location is trains will be cut by trespassers resulting in the train air brakes going into an emergency brake application requiring the Conductor to walk inspecting for the problem. To complete this task in a timely manner is best accomplished with a two-person crew. The nuisance of trespassers is a constant threat to a freight train making it from point A to B. Two people on the train are your first responders in the safe movement of interstate commerce. Please do not be lulled into a false sense of security by new technology. A two person crews’ judgement and experience serve as a bridge between technology and safety.

Public Roadway Blocked Crossings

I heard a politician say you get sworn in and then get sweared at! A blocked crossing will lead to this happening. There are times I close the windows and lock the doors when in the vicinity of a blocked crossing. Objects thrown and being shot at are two things you need to be aware of while operating a freight train. Safety needs to be a higher priority than profits when it comes to train length. Some preplanning of train building questions I would pose are: What should the limit be on train length? How will the length impact the community it will travel through? When performing set off and pick up work in different terminals are public crossings impacted? Time requirements when trouble arises, and the Conductor being required to walk and possibly a car set out or repaired ought to be considered as well. Just because you can DP a train to make it 2.5 to 3 miles long does not mean you should. There needs to be a balance between reasonable and excessive length. Train length must have limitations.

Rail Yard Illumination

Currently Ohio has no law about rail yard illumination. Railroad operations are 24/7 365 days a year. Where I work there are some lights out and the PUCO has been notified. On July 22, 2019 a PUCO inspector, a Trainmaster and myself met regarding some safety concerns and performed an on-site inspection. Since there is no law in Ohio requiring illumination the PUCO could only recommend the Railroad repair the dark yard lights - as of today the same yard lights are still not working and all I know is it is a work in progress. One application of the lighting is it helps me to see my intended route including switch targets along the way. Lighting increases situational awareness and reduces likelihood of a rule violation derailment and/or injury. The Employee Safety and General Conduct Rule Book requires lantern use by Train and Engine Service Employees. So, the Employees are required to use a light, but the Railroad in Ohio is not mandated to provide lighting.

Rail Yard Walkway Safety

As the campaign goes, “Lace up for safety!” Avoid slips, trips and falls. Employees have a role in accident prevention as does the Employer in making investments to upkeep and improve the conditions of their properties as they age. Yard tracks used for switching need to be kept to a certain standard for the Conductors, Utility Brakeman, Carmen, and Engineers that use them. Each track needs to be free from debris and weeds. Where you walk, how often and the type of surface it takes place on all play a role in wear and tear. Places such as Yard switching leads and walkways between tracks where Conductors and Car Inspectors perform their duties are best when the surface is level and a smaller size rock as opposed to road sized ballast is used. I would like Railroad properties to be subject to periodic inspections to ensure compliance to any standards imposed.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share Proponent Testimony for HB186.

Sincerely,

William Jeffrey Darling