



Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen Ohio State Legislative Board

A Division of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters Rail Conference

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Ohio House – Transportation Committee April 9, 2024 Meeting Testimony of John Esterly

Good afternoon, Chair McClain, Vice Chair Dobos, Ranking Member Grim, and members of the Transportation Committee of the Ohio House of Representatives. My name is John Esterly, and I am the State Legislative Board Chairman for the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen, but today I am here on behalf of the Ohio Delegation of the Teamsters Rail Conference. Collectively, we represent over 5,000 active and retired rail employees, including freight, passenger, and yard operating crews as well as track and facilities maintenance. Our organizations strongly support the common-sense provisions included in House Bill 372, known informally as Stop, Look, and Listen.

Track maintenance has evolved dramatically during the last generation of railroading. Gone are the sledgehammers and hand-driven spikes, having been replaced by technologically advanced track repair equipment. These new machines vary in size from truck-based inspection and light repair vehicles to purpose-built equipment that is hundreds of feet long and weigh nearly a thousand tons. The growing size of these machines leaves a growing gap in the statute that HB372 fixes.

HB372 adds four words to the Ohio Revised Code – and other on-track equipment – when discussing interactions between the public and rail equipment on the rails. This simple, common-sense bill is wildly popular, having passed in 36 other states and introduced in 4 more including Ohio. It is supported by rail labor, by the rail industry, and by rail safety organizations across the country.

Unique to Ohio, HB372 adds a provision for a judge to offer remedial training in lieu of fine or sentence. We are mindful that we are changing the rules for drivers and want to make sure that a new or unaware driver has the chance to be trained on the law and not harshly punished.

Ohio is one of the top five states in both rail miles and railroad crossing density. Crossing safety, both for the employees of the railroad and for the general public should be a top priority. HB372 will improve Ohio's grade crossing safety, cost nothing to the taxpayers or the railroad companies, and we are unaware of any opposition to the bill.

In closing, thank you to Chair McClain for considering HB372 in Committee, and thank you to Ranking Member Grim and Representative Hoops for carrying this critical piece of safety legislation. I am happy to answer questions the Committee may have.