



Mike Brzeczek, Machinist Specialist
Cenovus Energy, Toledo Refinery
Testimony before the Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Smith, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Cenovus Energy and United Steelworkers Local 1-346.

My name is Mike Brzeczek, a Machinist Specialist in Cenovus’s Toledo Refinery and a proud member of the United Steelworkers. USW Local 1-346 is an amalgamated local in Toledo representing more than 750 Steelworker members at Cenovus’s Toledo Refinery and several other large employers in Toledo.

Cenovus is the new operator of the Toledo Refinery, and the USW has forged a strong relationship with Cenovus since the company assumed operations of the refinery this February. Together, we prioritize safety and commit to protecting what matters - our workers and our community.

Safety is the highest priority for Cenovus and Steelworkers across Ohio. To prioritize safety, refiners must work together with operators, maintenance workers, and technicians – all of whom are represented by the USW – to create a strong safety culture. Since assuming operations in Toledo, USW Local 1-346 has worked with Cenovus to create this culture. A critical component of a positive safety culture is STOP Work Authority which allows any employee to order work to be stopped, on any project, if they see something that they believe to be unsafe. The plant managers at our Toledo and Lima refineries continue to advocate STOP Work Authority to all employees and this is a clear demonstration of their commitment to a safe working environment.

As a Machinist Specialist, I am responsible for troubleshooting and repairing refining equipment and units, including pumps, compressors, turbines, and other machinery that is operated across all process units. My job is critical to the reliability and safety of the refinery, and I have been through rigorous training to ensure I have the skills and knowledge to safely operate, troubleshoot, and repair refining equipment. The USW and Cenovus are working together on more training programs that will constantly improve safety in our refineries.

Regarding the type of training that we undergo, before serving as a machinist, I served as a unit operator where I completed numerous refinery-specific training programs, including classroom, shop, and on-the-job training to ensure I have the skills and knowledge to operate refining equipment. Some Machinist Specialists are hired into the refinery and are selected based upon their knowledge, experience gained in other industries, or their educational background, including being trained in building trade apprenticeship programs – which may include refinery-specific training. While on the job, machinists receive continuing education on specialized equipment through vendor training or by working in another refinery and learning from other experienced crafts.

In every facility we operate, the USW insists that continuous training be a priority for our operators, maintenance crafts, technicians, and other employees. We advocate for specialized training to ensure every USW member has the skills and knowledge to perform their jobs and crafts safely and provide for reliable operations of refining equipment.

House Bill 205 would not help refiners accomplish these goals because it mandates one type of training program for maintenance and construction in Cenovus Energy's refineries. These training programs are modeled after building trade apprenticeship programs and do not accommodate the specialized in-house training programs that many craftsmen and women receive. Although the USW training programs are different, they provide for a highly skilled workforce. In our Toledo facility, we have 74 total maintenance workers with over 900 combined years of experience – and 22 of those have previous experience as operators, which provides invaluable knowledge of facility operations.

Mandating one type of training program for refinery maintenance and construction will not improve safety in refineries. I urge the Committee to listen to the United Steelworkers who operate our refineries and oppose this anti-safety legislation.

Thank you.