

## Supporter Testimony for Senate Bill 88

Chris Ericksen

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Good afternoon, my name is Chris Ericksen, I have been a utility worker for over 20 years. That is long enough to know when the sound of gun fire is close enough to pack up and move out and when it is far enough away to keep working. I have been very lucky in my career that I have not experienced a personal attack. Not all of my coworkers can say that.

There is not always a warning of impending violence, there are times when the gunshots aren't getting closer, they are right here and they are right now. And sadly, there are times when utility workers are the intended targets of violence.

Utility Workers who are performing their jobs do not have the luxury of choosing the day, time, or location for their work. They respond in the communities they serve.

Often times this is in the worst-case scenario, it is often dark, it is either very hot or very cold and the public is on edge. People call and we show up. Utility workers provide the essential services society depends on, not just for comfort, but for health and for security, that is our chosen business.

The state of Ohio considered utility workers essential during the pandemic. Also, during the pandemic, The US department of Homeland Security identified 16 critical infrastructure work groups, 25 % of them delt directly with utility service. *One fourth of their recognized essential services are performed by utility workers.*

All utilities have employees who respond to outages or reported problems. In my line of work, they are referred to as switching and trouble workers, they work rotating shifts, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day and holidays. They work in all weather and in all neighborhoods. They perform switching to maintain the status of the grid and they respond to all reported cases of electrical trouble in their service area. They are our most vulnerable workers, but they are certainly not alone in facing danger. Every utility worker performs this function at some point, trouble work can be anyone's responsibility on any given day.

On Veterans' Day, last November, one of these trouble men was attacked. He had completed his assignment from the dispatcher and called home to check in with his wife. With his wife still on the phone, he was robbed and shot.

By what can only be defined as divine intervention, he was not killed... Despite the attacker taking 3 shots at close range, this gentleman survived. He received a number of stiches across the side of his head where a bullet made contact. Another inch forward, backward, left or right and he would have been shot in the head. All with his wife listening on the phone. Many in this room are married, everyone in this room has someone they care about, put yourself in the position of this woman for second.

He has since returned to work; in the same job he has done for many years.

Another pertinent example, this one more recent, a gentleman performing the same job, was in his line truck around lunch time on a Saturday. He was on the phone with the dispatch desk. He was updating

them on his arrival at the work location, a very normal and routine function of the job. With no warning, his truck was used as cover while a shooter opened fire on the house where the work was to be performed.

Again, by the grace of God, there was no return fire from the occupants of the home. Had a gun fight ensued, this trouble man would have been in the direct line of fire. It is chilling to think about.

In a true example of dedication, this utility worker remained on the scene. The wires he had been sent to fix were down and draped across a fence, still energized, exposing the public to a significant hazard. He made the needed repairs, protecting the people in that neighborhood

Now, I ask that we return the favor and protect this first responder and others like him.

This bill is not a cure all, it will not end all violence in our communities, but it will act to deter violence against these workers while they are at their most vulnerable, and while they are taking care of us.

Every step that can be taken to protect the safety of those who provide and maintain these essential services must be taken. In Illinois a similar bill became law, only after a gas worker was kidnapped and murdered. Please, let these examples I have given today be enough to take action.

I thank you for your time today and I thank you for your support.