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**Senate Transportation Committee  
SCR 8 Sponsor Testimony**

**Senator Cutrona:**

Chair Patton, Vice-Chair Schaffer, Ranking Member Antonio, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on Senate Concurrent Resolution 8.

This resolution urges Congress to pass the Reducing Accidents in Locomotives (RAIL) Act, a crucial piece of legislation aimed at improving rail safety across the nation.

On February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2023, a Norfolk Southern freight train derailed in East Palestine, Ohio – devastating a vital Ohio community in my district. This freight train, which consisted of 38 railcars, was carrying hazardous materials, causing toxic chemicals to be released into the air, soil, and waterways, threatening the health and safety of residents, first responders, and local wildlife. Several of these railcars burned for more than two days, perpetuating unsafe living conditions for the residents of East Palestine.

This disaster was a wake-up call – not only for East Palestine, but for the many communities across Ohio, and the nation, that live near rail lines and freight corridors. The RAIL Act is merely a safeguard to mitigate any future train derailments.

I have personally been to the crash site and seen, with my very eyes, the devastation that occurred in East Palestine. These tragedies need not be repeated. This resolution is a small step to enshrining rail safety across the nation, and with the backing of this committee, we can offer Ohio's support, for this indispensable cause.

Tragically, the East Palestine derailment was not an isolated event. Since 2020, more than 4,000 train derailments have occurred across the United States. Here in Ohio alone, we've experienced 281 train accidents between 2019 and 2022, placing our state among the three worst in the nation for serious rail incidents and hazardous materials spills.

The RAIL Act is a bipartisan federal proposal introduced by two of Ohio's own—Congresswoman Emilia Sykes and Congressman Michael Rulli—both of whom represent communities directly impacted by rail operations. This legislation seeks to strengthen federal oversight of railway safety, close dangerous regulatory gaps, and implement commonsense reforms to help prevent future tragedies. This is a logical next step to enhancing regulatory measures to keep Ohioans out of harm's way and further preventing these tragedies from ever occurring again.

I will now turn it over to my colleague, Senator Weinstein, to speak further to this legislation.

## **Senator Weinstein:**

Thank you Senator Cutrona, the RAIL Act would require all Class I freight and passenger trains to operate with a minimum of two-person crews, ensuring that trained personnel are on board to manage emergencies and reduce human error. It would strengthen inspection standards for all trains, particularly those carrying hazardous materials, and improve communication protocols so that state and local emergency response agencies are notified in advance about the transport of dangerous substances through their jurisdictions.

Additionally, the bill would improve the visibility and accuracy of safety placards, giving first responders the information they need to act quickly and effectively in the event of a derailment. It would also address specific mechanical vulnerabilities, such as the wheel bearing failures that contributed to the East Palestine derailment. The RAIL Act would raise the penalties for safety violations, provide increased funding for hazardous materials training for first responders, and require the Secretary of Transportation to implement new safety rules based on findings from the National Transportation Safety Board.

This is not a partisan issue—this is about the safety of Ohio families, the well-being of workers, and the ability of our emergency personnel to protect the communities they serve. When trains carrying toxic substances travel through our towns and cities, we have a responsibility to ensure that every reasonable safeguard is in place.

For many Ohioans, a train passing through town is a normal part of daily life—so routine it often goes unnoticed. But the derailment in East Palestine was a clear reminder that these everyday occurrences can carry serious consequences when safety measures fall short. The environmental and public health concerns that followed have left a lasting impact on the community.

The federal government must act, and Ohio must send a clear message that we support stronger safety standards, accountability for rail corporations, and proactive steps to protect Ohioans. The RAIL Act is not only a comprehensive and thoughtful response to recent disasters—it is a long-overdue investment in the safety and stability of our infrastructure.

By supporting this resolution, we can help prevent future tragedies, restore public trust in the safety of our rail systems, and demonstrate that Ohio stands firmly on the side of precaution, accountability, and prevention.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions the committee may have.

