



House Bill 283 – Proponent Testimony
Columbia Gas of Ohio
Ohio House Criminal Justice Committee
September 23, 2021

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chairman Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland and Members of the House Criminal Justice Committee – thank you for the opportunity to submit written proponent testimony on HB 283.

My name is Zane Daniels and I am Manager of Government Affairs for Columbia Gas of Ohio (COH) – the state’s largest, fully-regulated, natural gas utility. Headquartered in Columbus, OH, COH safely delivers natural gas service to more than 1.4 million customers in over 1,200 communities throughout our 61-county service territory.

HB 283 attempts to modernize Ohio’s distracted driving laws by prohibiting drivers from having physical contact with their phones or other wireless devices while driving or stopped in a lane of traffic. Currently, Ohio is only one of four states where distracted driving is not a primary offense.

With over 20,000 miles of distribution pipeline across the state, COH employees and contractors are often required to work in close proximity to streets, roads and highways performing essential pipeline replacement work so we can continue delivering natural gas to homes and businesses safely. Unfortunately, we’ve seen a significant increase in the number of work zone-related safety incidents over the past 12-24 months – resulting in significant property damage, serious injuries and several fatalities.

Since the beginning of 2020 – COH employees and contractors have recorded over 30 intrusions, encroachments and near misses in Ohio work zones alone. Although it’s difficult to say with absolute certainty that these incidents directly result from distracted driving, there is no question that drivers are more distracted today than ever before.

Distracted driving prevents motorists from seeing important safety messaging of upcoming work zones, noticing reduced speed limits, heavy equipment and identifying

traffic controllers (flaggers) – all of which create additional risk for the motorist and our employees.

At COH, our top priority is the health and safety of our employees, contractors and customers and careless, distracted and impatient drivers are putting our crews at risk. HB 283 is common sense, long overdue legislation that provides law enforcement with an important tool to help stop deadly accidents by maintaining safer roads and highways.

I want to thank Representatives Abrams and Lampton for sponsoring this critical legislation, and on behalf of Columbia's 1,200 Ohio-based employees – I'd ask for your support.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Zane Daniels". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

Zane T. Daniels
Manager, Government Affairs
Columbia Gas of Ohio