

Ohio House Committee on Transportation and Public Safety
State Representative Michael Sheehy
Sponsor Testimony – House Bill 195

Chairman Baldrige, Vice Chairman McClain, and members of the Transportation and Public Safety Committee Ohio House of Representatives. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 195 which will address several additional measures that protect both public safety and railroad workers' safety, including blocked crossings, walkway conditions, and lighting conditions. Throughout this testimony, I will be referring to another safety measure that Rep. Lepore-Hagan and I have introduced, House Bill 194, which would require two-person crews on freight trains.

Operating a freight train is a highly sensitive task. Crew members must hold certification and be educated about and comply with Federal Regulations. Freight trains of Class I [One] Railroads in Ohio must be prevented from blocking a public crossing where emergency vehicles must cross both to save life or prevent loss of property. Mr. Chairman and Members of the Transportation and Safety Committee, a typical freight train of a Class I Railroad with locomotive[s] attached can measure two miles or more in length. If stopped, a train of this length can block every major crossing in many Ohio towns and villages, preventing movement across the tracks of all vehicular traffic. To comply with Ohio law, the train must be moved within 5 minutes or be cut in two to clear the blocked tracks. A one person crew would have a difficult time complying with the second part of this requirement.

This legislation also addresses some safety concerns of proper lighting and walkway conditions in railroad yards. Freight railroad workers are responsible, committed citizens who are largely ignored or taken for granted. Loss of a leg, an arm or severe injuries of railroad workers usually do not even qualify as newsworthy items in local media.

Many railroad yard train switching operations require a Remote Control Operator. This Operator must carry a control box on his/her chest, in addition to carrying a lantern, a radio and a switching list. We should require yard conditions to be well-lighted with a safe, graded surface for walking. This legislation requires rail yards to be illuminated in accordance with the standards established by the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America. Furthermore, the bill requires a railroad company to construct a walkway adjacent to any track where company employees frequently perform switching activities. HB 194 also allows employees to file complaints alleging a violation of any of these standards.

Members of the Transportation and Safety Committee, I have spent more than forty years in the railroad industry. I have worked in rail yards from Toledo to Cincinnati, from Willard, Ohio to Chicago, Illinois. I have very strong affection for the industry and even the Corporation that gave me steady work and a good retirement. This proposed law, I believe, will provide needed rules to protect Ohioans and assure safety for both the public and railroad worker alike.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today and I welcome any questions.