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State Representative

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361 Testimony

Chair Baldrige, Vice Chair McClain, Ranking Member Sheehy, and members of the Ohio House Transportation Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 361.

I want to echo a lot of what my joint sponsor, Representative Miranda shared and also touch on why this bill is important here in the state of Ohio. This bipartisan approach comes after months of trying to collaborate with not one but two rail lines, North folk Southern and CSX.

Before getting into the legislation, I would first like to start on how we got here. Earlier this year, I was approached by a group of concerned residents in my district. Previous to my time in the General Assembly, I served two terms as a Madison Township Trustee. It is where I learned that local government was the best government. Fast forward to now, I was visiting with one of my townships, St. Clair Township, on Feb 8<sup>th</sup> of this year, and heard from concerned residents of blocked crossings in their community. Upon further conversations, I learned that at times, the three entrances and exits to this subdivision of over 215 homes were blocked due to rail cars blocking and sitting on the tracks, not for 5 min or 10 min but at times hours. As I was certainly concerned, I met with the local officials, spoke at the Butler County Commissioners Meeting alongside the residents, and worked with our County Engineer to see what options were available in this situation.

After months of conversations, and a problem that continually seems to get worse, we developed HB 361. As my Joint Sponsor outlined, we are raising the penalty for a blocked crossing and ensuring that PUCO is notified of each event to produce a yearly report. We have worked with LSC to draft a bill that is arguably not protected by the many federal statutes that exist to give protection to the railroad. In collaborating with

the rail lines in the recent months, we have heard reason after reason on why there is blocked crossings. Between train crews, to infrastructure, to “we-were-here-first” mentality, no solution has yet to come to fruition. On top of the average length now close to 14,000 ft, whereas they used to run 8,500 ft.

I have with me today logs and information that were provided to me by people from my district of blocked crossings. One instance just took place two weeks ago, with a family being blocked for over 60 hours due to a train waiting for a new crew. These people are trapped at times and simply looking to help. These are people trying to do the simple things, like take their kids to school or sports, get home from work or run to the store - all not being able to because of the blocked crossings they encounter.

As someone who has a railroad in their backyard, I am not here today to object to the railroads purpose, but I am here today as a voice for the many residents in my district alone who face this issue on almost a daily basis. I am here today to stand with the people all across Ohio who face this issue and if I say it once I will say it again, I am here today to find solutions to this issue, as I am remised to have to go down this legislative route to get the railroads attention.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on HB 361 and I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.