



**Monica Robb Blasdel**  
State Representative, 79<sup>th</sup> District

Chair Peterson, Vice Chair Thomas, Ranking Member Forhan and members of the House Government Oversight Committee, thank you for providing myself and my joint-sponsor, Representative McNally the opportunity to testify on House Resolution 33 – To urge Congress to pass legislation requiring railroads to inform state and local governments when they run hazardous materials through their jurisdictions.

As you all know, on the night of February 3<sup>rd</sup>, a wheel bearing on general merchandise freight train 32N caught fire as it was passing through my district in Columbiana County. As the train traveled through the heart of East Palestine, Ohio, this mechanical failure derailed 38 railcars, including 11 tank cars carrying hazardous materials that caught fire and burned for the next two days. During this time, breached tanks dumped potentially tens of thousands of gallons of hazardous materials onto the surrounding site, including vinyl chloride, ethylhexyl acrylate and butyl acrylates among others. On February 6<sup>th</sup>, officials recognized a concerning temperature change in one of the hazardous tank cars. Fearing an explosion, a controlled release and burn of the train's 5 vinyl chloride tank cars was conducted, creating the infamous black plume we have all seen. As these materials escaped into the air, ground and water, my constituents have been left scared as to how it may affect their health, businesses, livestock and crops both in the short and long-term.

I have spent much time since the derailment working with the local officials and my constituents to hear their concerns firsthand and voice those concerns to the parties that are involved in the remediation efforts. I have traveled to East Palestine on numerous occasions, and I want the residents to know that I stand firm in providing any support needed in the short and long term.

I was proud to support this General Assembly's Transportation Budget, which had a historic focus on train safety in the State of Ohio. It included provisions mandating two-person train crews, ensuring the effective operation of wayside detectors, requiring incident reports for all blocked crossings that last more than 5 minutes and requiring the preparation of a written report to the General Assembly pertaining to the transportation of hazardous materials and waste. Unfortunately, much of the state's power to regulate the railroads is preempted by federal law. Where we have been limited, we must lean on Congress to protect citizens in Ohio and across the country.

Despite the train carrying 20 cars that held hazardous materials, it was not considered a "high hazard flammable train" by federal regulations, so the railroads were not required to notify

anyone at the state or local level of what was being transported through our neighborhoods. While Rep. McNally will dive further into the current requirements, the disaster in East Palestine has highlighted how impractical and dangerous they can be. It is essential that Congress re-assesses these conditions and demand the transparency of valuable safety information. We have a right to know what is traveling through our hometowns and must be immediately able to respond to any breach of these materials, as we saw in East Palestine.

I applaud Ohio's Senate delegation, where last week Senators Vance and Brown introduced the Railway Safety Act of 2023. Among other things, the Act would codify nationally many of the same provisions we added into the Transportation Budget. It would also require railroads to create disaster plans and notably, notify emergency response commissions when hazardous materials are being transported through their states. Let us signal to Congress the Ohio House of Representative's support for important legislation like this, which prioritizes and modernizes our country's railroad safety regulations.

I want to thank first responders from nearly 70 different departments within the tri-state area, Fire Chief Keith Drabick and Mayor Trent Conaway, who initially took charge and brought guidance and resources to a community that was shocked and scared. The cleanup in East Palestine is just getting started. In the coming months and years, we must continue to support these efforts and right now the Ohio House has an obligation to call on Congress to change the federal requirements on notifying state and local governments when hazardous materials are traveling through their jurisdictions. For this reason, I ask for your support on House Resolution 33. Thank you for your time and I will now hand it over to my joint sponsor, whose district also includes a portion of western Columbiana County, Representative McNally.