Testimony of Representative Michael Sheehy before the

Ohio House Transportation and Safety Committee

Chairman Green, Vice Chairman McClain presiding

Chairman Green, Vice Chairman McClain, members of the Transportation and Public Safety Committee Ohio House of Representatives. Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony on House Bill 186 which will address both public safety as well as railroad worker safety in the State of Ohio.

Historically members of a freight railroad crew consisted of an Engineer, a Fireman, a Conductor and two Brakemen. With advances in technology, that crew size is reduced today to a Conductor and an Engineer. For public safety reasons, we join the ten states who have or are considering requiring a two-person crew 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.

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.