

MEMORANDUM

To: Ohio House of Representatives – Commerce and Labor Committee
From: Michael Knisley
Date: 10/26/2021

Re: HB 235 – High Hazard Training Certification Act

Chairman Stein / Vice-Chair Johnson / Ranking Member Lepore-Hagan:

My name is Mike Knisley. I'm a pipefitter by trade. I've worked in both the Lima and Oregon refineries. I'm a lifelong member of the Lima community. My home and property is located 7 miles downwind of the now Cenovus Oil Refinery in Lima, which is the largest oil refinery in Ohio.

I'm also the Executive Secretary-Treasurer of the Ohio State Building and Construction Trades Council. We represent nearly 100,000 building and construction tradespeople—men and women that put on a hardhat and go to work at a construction jobsite here in Ohio every day.

Our members and partner contractors believe in exceptional training; good wages; competitive benefits; and our goal is to ensure that our workers return home safely to their families each and every night. Ohio's Building Trades members have the proper licensing, apprenticeship and safety training to build and maintain everything you can imagine, including Ohio's major oil refineries. For the reasons that follow, I offer this testimony in support of House Bill 235.

The safety provisions in House Bill 235, the High-Hazard Training Certification Act are critical to securing the safety of the construction workers who build and maintain Ohio's oil refineries. In addition, House Bill 235 ensures the protection of public health and safety in the refinery communities where our tradespeople live and raise their families.

Let me tell you, the loss of even one worker causes tremendous devastation to their family, their workplace, and their community.

There's a lot at stake here. I don't think it is too much to ask that there be a level of training that holds companies and workers accountable for safety in high-hazard oil refineries.

The Ohio Building Trades lead our industry in safety on major construction projects. Our safety record in Ohio's oil refineries represents the gold-standard in high-hazard construction maintenance:

Lima and Toledo Building Tradespeople have worked 21 million maintenance workhours in Ohio's oil refineries over the past 20 years without a single lost-time injury. With BP and Cenovus' new outsourcing approach, these workers will be replaced by low-wage workers with reduced safety and skills training and zero institutional knowledge of Ohio's complex high-risk oil refinery facilities.

No matter how experienced or well trained in their skilled trade and safety precautions, our Ohio refinery workers are put at grave risk if they work alongside an unskilled worker during a plant turnaround or maintenance cycle.

Since the early 1990s, OSHA has documented that petroleum refineries specifically pose acute risk of debilitating workplace accidents and worker fatalities. A skilled worker shortage, paired with lax safety and skills training requirements has led to a recent surge in serious OSHA safety violations in petroleum refineries. All it takes is one mistake for a refinery accident to impact an entire community like my hometown of Lima.

The high barrier to entry in the petroleum-refining industry means that not just any business owner can open a refinery. Only established petroleum industry leaders have the expertise to own petroleum refineries. Similarly, our state must have reasonable and wise training standards for workers in Ohio's oil refineries. You can't allow unscrupulous contractors and subcontractors to bring in inexperienced, untrained people to work in Ohio's refineries. **Refinery construction is work that has zero margin for error.**

Ohio's Building Tradespeople must have a voice in policies that protect them in high-hazard facilities. We must have reasonable policies that protect Ohio communities from industrial accidents in high-risk refineries. As a tradesperson who has worked in our state's oil refineries, I urge this body to protect Ohio workers and the public from catastrophic incidents by implementing the high-hazard training standards in House Bill 235.

Thank you for your consideration of this very important proposal.

Sincerely,

Mike Knisley
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