



**Representative Michele Lepore-Hagan
58th House District**

**Representative Jim Hoops
81st House District**

**House Bill 670 Sponsor Testimony
Criminal Justice Committee
Tuesday, November 29, 2022**

Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Leland, and Members of the Criminal Justice Committee, thank you for allowing us the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 670 (HB 670), “Stop, Watch, and Listen for On-Track Equipment at Rail Crossings.” I would like to thank Representative Hoops for agreeing to be a joint sponsor on this important safety legislation pertaining to motorists’ responsibilities and railroad crossing laws. Very similar legislation has been passed in in Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Massachusetts, Montana, Tennessee, Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming and others, **totaling 29 states.**

This legislation addresses maintenance of way, railroad contractors and other on-track equipment not included in state statute, and mandating motorist’s responsibilities when approaching a crossing. In other words, when the gates are down and a train is approaching, or a flagman or stop sign is present, a motorist is responsible for stopping, watching and listening before moving over the crossing.

Ohio law requires updating because on-track maintenance equipment has evolved into “train like” machines. This equipment presents the same dangers to drivers as that of a train engine or train-with-cars. This equipment cannot just stop on a dime if a car enters the crossing.

Drivers must become more educated, as their vehicles do have the ability to stop and go more quickly.

This is an easy fix and is supported by rail labor, the railroads themselves, and railroad contractors. In fact, having introduced this legislation multiple times, I have still not found any opposition. Twice this exact legislation has passed the House unanimously because it is truly a public safety issue. All this legislation will do is add the language: “or other on-track equipment” into current law anywhere it says “when a train is approaching”.

This change presents no cost to the state or ODOT, but leaving our law in its current form presents an enormous human cost. In the US in 2018, there were over 2000 collisions on railroad crossings and 270 deaths and 819 injuries, with 9 deaths in Ohio.

This is truly a public safety issue. Ohioans are well aware that trains occupy the tracks in their respective neighborhoods, but not everyone is aware of the on track maintenance and construction machines that travel on the track infrastructure in our country. To ensure motorists are safe at rail crossings, we must clarify that there are other pieces of equipment that travel on railroad tracks and present the same dangers to motorists as trains do.

In last two General Assemblies, as both HB 190 and HB 226, this legislative train-ride didn't reach its final destination even with unanimous support from the Ohio House of Representatives. I hope in this, my final General Assembly, we are ticketed for safe travel throughout the state and can get on board with over half the nation in making this commonsense fix.

Thank you Chairman LaRe, Vice Chair White, Ranking Member Leland, and Members of the Criminal Justice Committee. We will be glad to answer any questions you might have.

