

Representatives

Cindy Abrams
Willis E. Blackshear, Jr.
Juanita O. Brent
Sara P. Carruthers
Rodney Creech
Steve Demetriou
Thomas Hall
Adam C. Miller
Kevin D. Miller
Ismail Mohamed



Chairman

Haraz N. Ghanbari

Vice-Chairman

Phil Plummer

Ranking Member

Cecil Thomas

HOMELAND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes | June 14, 2023

Chairman Ghanbari called the committee to order at 11:00 a.m.

Vice Chair Plummer moves to amend HB 205 with amendment AM_135_0981. He clarifies the amendment is to change the name of the bill from the "High Hazard Training Certification (HHTC) Act" to the "Protect Ohio Workers Act"

Chairman Ghanbari asks if there are any objections, there are none.

Chairman Ghanbari calls HB 205 for its 2nd hearing.

Chairman Ghanbari calls forward Matt Szollosi for proponent testimony.

Matt Szollosi states ACT Ohio's position is they are strongly in support of HB 205. HB 205 only applies to oil refineries in Ohio and no other facilities. The bill is narrowly tailored and specifically is directed at oil refineries in the state of Ohio. There are only the three northwestern refineries that are included in the scope of the bill as they are the only ones who meet the barrel a day requirement. HB 205 does not apply to the employees of the refineries. This is aimed at the external construction workforce. The bill crafts labor standards to assure that the subcontractors have sufficient skills and certifications in safety. The safety training hours have been agreed to be lowered to 600 hours instead of the previous 1,000 hours. This is not training is not specific to unions only, this allows any state or DOL apprenticeship training program to qualify. The need for this bill lies in the high risk environment that these workers are in as well as the bodily injury that could be inflicted on them and the surrounding communities.

Chairman Ghanbari clarifies the oil refinery that is labeled 'Toledo' is in Oregon.

Matt Szollosi states this is true.

Chairman Ghanbari states there is another article that was released by the Toledo Blade that shows what may have been the cause of the deaths at the Toledo refinery. There were 10 serious violations that were cited against the company and 1 not serious. The citations were lack of training, problems with implementing safe work practices, and a failure to address the overfilling of the process vessels.

Ranking member Thomas states this bill is about safety overall. He asks how old the four refineries are.

Matt Szollosi states the refineries in Ohio are all over a hundred years old.

Ranking member Thomas asks what the concerns for safety are if we do not put in these measures in place.

Matt Szollosi states they are and the unskilled workers that have been subcontracted into these projects that have caused fires and four workers injured at the refinery in Lima.

Representative Creech asks what the increase costs will be and how this will be passed onto the consumer.

Matt Szollosi states Ohio construction workers have not priced themselves out of this market place. The real cost would be the cost of not requiring these safety measures. The price of gas skyrocketed after the explosion in Toledo and the workers could not go to work. As well as the small businesses who had to pay for these increased gas prices.

Representative Mohamed asks about the provision in the bill that requires the workers to be proficient in English and how will this be enforced.

Matt Szollosi states this is new to the bill from the previous General Assembly. He clarifies that this is not an English only rule, this only means that the worker must be able to speak English in order to satisfy safety concerns with communication.

Representative Mohamed states his concern that this does not specify if there is a broader impact as far how this can be enforced.

Matt Szollosi states the goal is not to be overbearing for what the contractors must be able to do. This should also not be a stretch due to the fact that these refineries already have these provisions in their own hiring process, however this has not been enforced.

Chairman Ghanbari states in a situation that he has been in, there was a state trooper attempting to pull over a vehicle. Due to a language and cultural barrier there was a misunderstanding and the individual continued to drive. This situation translates to this provision in the bill.

Representative Kevin Miller asks if it is appropriate for the committee to assume that all of the nonunion programs qualifies them to the refineries.

Matt Szollosi states this is true and the language from the bill does include any of those training programs. This included 272 total building trades and non-union training programs that are qualified under the provision of the bill. He states that the money that is provided by the unions is not paid by taxes. The goal of the bill is the overall quality of training credentials is not far below what Ohio has to offer.

Representative Adam Miller states the bill in front today is narrower than last General Assembly and it will not cover the other major construction plants. He asks what the bill would look like if it was broadened.

Matt Szollosi clarifies the bill is not narrower in general, it is only tailored specifically to the oil refineries in Ohio that meet the barrels per day requirement.

Representative Adam Miller states there has been similar legislation passed in other states and therefore why is it important to implement this in Ohio at this time.

Matt Szollosi states there are no wage standards or other standards being set, this is purely for apprenticeship and safety training.

Ranking member Thomas states he would prefer to see our Ohio workers earning this money and he asks how important it is to ACT Ohio to reach this goal.

Matt Szollosi states this is critically important because his own job is to advance the interest of the workers. This money is going back into Ohio businesses because it is allowing these workers to make wages that allow them to spend it in the local economy.

Chairman Ghanbari calls for Carl Cochenour to give proponent testimony.

Carl Cochenour states he is worried about the people he works with due to the safety standards that they work in. The complexities of the elements that come together for the refineries to function are immense. During a recent renovation at his plant, they were not able to tell if the material they were working with was asbestos. If it was not for the local insulators, they could have exposed the entire job site and local area. When it comes to the scaffolding that they are building on their job site, the out of state subcontractors will build quickly and in a way that will make it unsafe to work without a harness. Additionally, when there is a situation where there is danger tape or an area is blocked off, you have to be able to communicate with the other workers on site to decide whether or not it is safe enough to send his team into the area to work on it. There are thousands of Ohio workers that are skilled and are able to handle this job. However, these subcontractors are from out of state and are unskilled.

Representative Abrams asks what sort of damage Carl Cochenour saw when he was working on renovating the site.

Carl Cochenour states the explosion proof panels and the beams holding it up were melted as well as the concrete was broken apart.

Representative Abrams states she is thankful for the work that Carl Cochenour and his team does.

Chairman Ghanbari calls forward Scott Hayes for proponent testimony.

Scott Hayes states PBF energy is in favor of the bill. They rely on subcontractors and they ask a lot from their own employees. For this relationship to work, they require safety to be at the forefront. He clarifies that the safety lies in the competency of the worker to be on the job.

Chairman Ghanbari calls forward State Representative Josh Williams for proponent testimony.

State Representative Josh Williams states this bill will set minimal safety standards for these oil refineries that are in his district. He states that it is still unclear if it was possible to prevent this explosion as it would be inappropriate. They are currently waiting for the investigation's results to be returned. During the time of the investigation it caused months of these workers to be out of work. There are currently many apprenticeship training programs that are registered and there are a lot that are offered that are non-union. This is not a force unionization bill. This only sets a standards for the workers to have graduated from any of the state or DOL approved training programs.

Chairman Ghanbari thanks State Representative Josh Williams for coming in and testifying in committee as a sitting colleague in the house.

Chairman Ghanbari calls for the 2nd hearing of HB 176. There are no proponents available.

Chairman Ghanbari calls for the 2nd hearing of HB 167.

Chairman Ghanbari calls for Corey Jordan to give proponent testimony for HB 167.

Corey Jordan reiterates what the bill accomplishes.

Representative Adam Miller asks about the joint training that the military services provide for the armed services and whether or not they have considered these trainings.

Corey Jordan states that this would have to be a question before the commission to decide whether or not this would qualify for the requirements that they set forward.

Chairman Ghanbari calls forward Mike Weinman for proponent testimony.

Mike Weinman states that the Fraternal Order of Police support this bill. They support the bill because it will allow the new chief to receive the full training that they require while making sure that the training is more localized to their community.

Chairman Ghanbari calls forward Chief Douglas Jerome.

Chief Douglas Jerome states he had to deal with the issue that this bill addresses first hand. He had already taken the class 8 years prior to him becoming chief and was required to still take the training again. They allowed an exception of removing 8 hours from the training. This bill will allow for a solution to be offered because it will cover any chief that has not already held this position. He urges the committee to add the language that states that it is for any new chief that has never held the position.

Chairman Ghanbari concludes the hearing for HB 167.

Chairman Ghanbari adjourns committee at 12:41 p.m.