

March 23, 2021

The Honorable Delores Kelley and Members of the Environment and Transportation Committee

Testimony in **Support of HB 492** “Railroad Company - Movement of Freight - Required Crew”

My name is Tom Cahill. I am Maryland-born and raised and have been a licensed locomotive engineer and conductor for CSX Transportation for 25 years. I want to share my insight and safety concerns as they pertain to HB 492 “Railroad Company - Movement of Freight - Required Crew” and the important benefits that the passage of this bill will have on public safety and the safety of railroad employees.

The bill as presented requires at least two railroad employees for freight train movements on shared hi-speed passenger or commuter lines within the state, which is critically important. As an engineer who has been involved in many accidents, I can tell you that the atmosphere after an accident is chaotic.

What’s fortunate is that the conductor and engineer work together as a tightly coupled cooperative team to ensure safety and efficiency. As a team, conductors and engineers communicate constantly. They work together to monitor the train and track conditions, identify or anticipate problems, resolve or mitigate risks, and plan ahead during low periods of activity. Conductors also provide important support to engineers by reminding the engineer of upcoming changes, restrictions, or signals; helping to catch and mitigate mistakes; as well as helping the engineer to stay alert during monotonous conditions.

Along these lines, studies have shown that when working as a team, crewmembers are able to point out situations that may have escaped the other's cognitive and collaborative demands or physical ability; like finding the quickest exit, notifying multiple authorities, summoning emergency responders and preventing additional trains from becoming involved in their derailment.

In the 2016 Federal Railroad Administration’s Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on freight train crew size, the FRA described a myriad of ways in which a single-person crew would have been unable to execute a similarly effective emergency response, confirming the important safety benefits that multiple-person crews bring to train operations.

A reduction in crew size would increase worker fatigue and lead to a higher risk of train accidents. Fatigue has long been recognized as one of the most critical safety issues in the railroad industry because we operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and work irregular hours, including nights and weekends, and holidays. Most crews are on long routes that keep them away from home for extended periods of time with work schedules that impact their duration of sleep, which can impact whether they’re properly rested for their next assignment.

Since the engineer must remain in the locomotive cab to act quickly if the conditions warrant to move the train, having the second crew member to immediately assess the situation and act is paramount to public safety. A second crew member is vital in that they can instantly tend to the injured, contact emergency services and clear blocked road crossings for emergency vehicles or the public.

Even under the best operating circumstances, train crews have a myriad of intangibles that must be tactfully dealt with. A single employee cannot safely, efficiently, or properly perform all the required functions that are necessary on even the most routine trips, in addition to operating the train and keeping a vigilant lookout for the unexpected.

During deliberations of the federal Railroad Safety Advisory Committee Working Group (RSAC), which is comprised of rail labor, management and FRA participants, they identified the many responsibilities of train and yard service employees. These responsibilities encompassed 145 job functions. Additionally, locomotive engineer positions encompass many more distinct job functions. Requiring one employee to perform all of these job responsibilities combined creates a substantial threat to safety.

Representatives of the railroads argue that with the implementation of Positive Train Control (PTC) there is no longer a need to have a second person in the operating cab. Two-person train crews look out for each other in ways that no onboard electronic device can. Our freight trains approach three miles in length weighing over 18,000 tons and carry many hazardous materials. Any incident that would stop these trains could block off an entire town. It is critical that a second crew member be in position to immediately clear road crossings for emergency vehicles and the public.

In addition, a single crewmember cannot properly secure a freight train that is to be left unattended. This could result in a run-away that would wreak havoc on any one of our towns or metropolitan areas. One only has to recall what happened in Lac-Megantic, Quebec.

Following that disaster, a 2016 study of residents of Lac-Megantic found that two-thirds of residents suffered from moderate to severe post-traumatic stress disorder, and many reported being traumatized by the sight of a sunset, the sounds of slamming doors, and both real and toy trains.

In closing, on behalf of myself and my co-workers and for the safety of the public, I urge you to support the passage of HB 492!

Sincerely,

Tom Cahill  
Westminster, MD