



MARYLAND STATE & D.C. AFL-CIO

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HB 958 - Railroads - Safety Requirements (Maryland Railway Safety Act of 2025) House Environment and Transportation Committee February 20, 2025

SUPPORT

**Donna S. Edwards
President**

Maryland State and DC AFL-CIO

Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 958. My name is Donna S. Edwards, and I am the President of the Maryland State and District of Columbia AFL-CIO. On behalf of Maryland's 300,000 union members, I offer the following comments.

HB 958 presents a proactive measure to enhance the safety and security of Maryland's railways, preventing devastating tragedies like we see across the country. By implementing adequate safety requirements for rail operations, this legislation aims to protect workers, our local communities, and the environment.

Our state relies on rail transport to bolster our economy, but without comprehensive safety requirements, it poses significant safety and operational risks. HB 958 addresses these concerns by proposing a number of reasonable standards to avoid potential disasters.

This legislation would:

- **Require a 2-person minimum crew on a freight train.**
 - Freight train crews work long hours and are on call 24/7. Crew members are responsible for various tasks everyday making it difficult to complete alone. Since fatigue is a major safety concern, having at least two crew members is essential to ensure compliance with the railroad's complex operating rules to maintain safe operations.
- **Specify reporting requirements when transporting hazardous materials via freight trains.**

- This provision will provide critical data to emergency management agencies, allowing for a more efficient and effective response in case of an accident, allowing first responders to be readily prepared when being dispatched to an accident site and well-informed of any hazardous materials that are being transported through the communities.
- **Prohibit trains from blocking road crossings.**
 - When trains block road crossings, it is a public safety issue for individuals and our emergency service providers. For individuals, as trains block a road crossing, they start looking for ways to get around the train and to their destination, this results in some climbing under and through the trains which could move at any moment, often causing irreversible damage.
- **Specify requirements for wayside detector systems.**
 - Defect detector systems would be required at certain intervals and to be in working order and capable of notifying the train crew when any event is detected requiring an alert. These systems detect a number of indicators that have the potential to cause derailment such as dragging equipment or wheel bearings overheating. When wayside sectors are in proper working conditions with proper limits set for activation, the crew is able to take immediate action to rectify the incident on detection and notification.
- **Allow union representatives to conduct safety inspections.**
 - The State's railroad inspection division currently has one railroad inspector for over 2,000 miles of trackage throughout the state. This provision allows designated union representatives to supplement the process of safety inspections to investigate violations of federal or state laws and safety hazards, ultimately better supporting the division while mitigating any incidents that threaten public safety and adding a level of accountability.
- **Limit train length.**
 - This provision relates to the issue of trains blocking road crossings for extended periods of time making it difficult for first responders trying to get to an emergency call. Additionally, there are some freight trains that are two to three miles in length, increasing the risk for mechanical and operational failures and unsafe situations for engineers operating the trains.

Railroad operating rules have historically been enacted *after* a tragic incident has occurred. This legislation works to prevent the kind of catastrophic events that have devastated communities in other states and positions Maryland as a leader in railway safety, setting a standard that prioritizes worker support, compliance, and environmental protection.

For these reasons, we urge a favorable vote on HB 958.