



Testimony - SB 156, Railroads - Required Crew for Movement of Freight  
Favorable  
Senate Finance Committee  
February 3, 2026  
Christopher C. Cano, MPA  
Director of Political & Legislative Affairs on Behalf of SEIU Local 500

Honorable Chairwoman Beidle & Members of the Senate Finance Committee:

SEIU Local 500 represents thousands of public sector and higher education workers across Maryland. While our members are not railroad employees, they live, work, and travel in communities that depend on safe rail operations. Many of our members commute on passenger and commuter rail systems that share rail corridors with freight trains, and they work in public buildings, schools, and campuses located near active rail lines.

Rail safety is worker safety and public safety.

SB 156 recognizes the reality that single-person freight train operations increase the risk of accidents, equipment failure, and delayed emergency response—especially in corridors shared with high-speed passenger or commuter rail. Requiring at least two trained crew members provides critical redundancy to address mechanical issues, human error, medical emergencies, and unforeseen hazards.

This bill is particularly important given the increasing length, weight, and complexity of modern freight trains. One worker alone cannot safely monitor equipment, communicate with dispatch, respond to emergencies, and protect surrounding communities at the same time. A two-person crew is not excessive—it is the minimum needed to safely operate freight trains in shared corridors.

For SEIU Local 500 members, the stakes are real. A derailment or rail incident does not stop at the tracks. It can shut down commuter routes, disrupt school and workplace access, damage nearby infrastructure, and expose workers and residents to hazardous

materials. Preventing these incidents before they occur is far less costly—and far more responsible—than responding after the fact.

SB 156 also appropriately places responsibility on railroad companies rather than individual workers, reinforcing that safety failures are the result of corporate decisions, not frontline employees being asked to do the impossible alone.

Finally, SEIU Local 500 supports the bill's regional contingency approach, which recognizes the interconnected nature of rail systems across state lines while ensuring Maryland is prepared to act in coordination with neighboring states.

Senate Bill 156 reflects a basic principle: efficiency must never come at the expense of safety. Ensuring adequate staffing on freight trains protects workers, passengers, and the communities railroads move through every day.

For these reasons, SEIU Local 500 respectfully urges the committee to issue a favorable report on Senate Bill 156.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Christopher C. Cano, MPA  
Director of Political & Legislative Affairs  
SEIU Local 500