

House Bill 190 = Rail Safety = Public Safety

Matt's Testimony before the Rail and Transit Sub-Committee

Sub-Committee Chairman Carpenter and members of the Rail & Transit Sub-Committee, thank you for your service to our great state, thank you for the opportunity to speak before you and for your attention toward this important issue, the issue of Public Safety, the issue of saving a life. My name is Matt Campbell – I am a Railroad conductor with 19 years seniority and have operated trains thousands of miles across the southeast and have seen things that you would not believe. I serve as the Georgia Legislative Director for SMART-Transportation Division which is a Rail Labor organization made up of thousands of Railroad Workers and Retirees here in Georgia and many, many more across the country.

In addition to lobbying down here at the Capitol I serve as a member of the Association of American Railroad's Safety Appliance Task Force (which is a think tank made up of Railroad safety professionals, Rail Car manufacturers, ergonomics experts, etc.. who develop improvements that make Rail cars safer for employees and customers). I also work alongside the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), in party status, as a Rail Incident Investigator. Just a couple of months ago, in December, I was called to investigate the death of a Welder who was run over by a train while working on the railroad track in Estill, South Carolina near Hardeeville. During last year's legislative session, I spent over a week in Cayce South Carolina, just south of Columbia, investigating a head-on collision of an AMTRAK passenger train and a CSX freight train. One of the crew members aboard that AMTRAK train and was killed in that wreck was a Georgian, a resident of Richmond Hill, Georgia. His name was Michael Kempf, he came to work on the railroad after retiring from the US Army, I trained him for his job when he first started at CSX many years ago. Not only did the railroad workers killed in these preventable accidents lose their lives too soon, the survivors have to carry those horrific moments for the rest of their lives. I have seen death and devastation from preventable railroad accidents up close, many times, it never gets any easier, every incident is personal to me; especially, when it is something that could have been prevented.

HB 190 – is a preventative measure our state can and should take to avoid tragedy- in the interest of public safety and to save a life. HB 190 is a simple, common sense piece of legislation that does 2 things: Number 1. requires railroad companies to install an AED defibrillator into the crew cab of a locomotive- so that when a train crew is aboard a locomotive, out in the woods, away from anyone else or any access to medical attention- they at least have an inexpensive tool that could save one of their lives. and number 2. HB 190 Maintains adequate staffing on freight trains. That's it.

And Despite what mistruths you may have been told, states have the explicit authority to regulate railroad safety and have done so many times addressing a variety of shortfalls in federal code. The states of Arizona, Wisconsin, West Virginia, and California have asserted their authority to protect the public, enacting similar legislation to HB 190, some as far back as 1992.

Just this week the State of Colorado passed through both chambers, HB19-1034, to protect its citizens by mandating that freight train crews operate with no less than a crew of 2 people.

Georgia has the power to fill the gap left by the federal government to protect our citizens and should do so when the opportunity arises.

It is unfortunate that because HB 190 is supported by railroad workers like myself and opposed by the railroad corporate lobbyists, it has been mislabeled as a "Labor" bill instead of a public safety initiative. Yes, thousands of Georgia workers - rail labor, who actually work on the railroad, experts in the craft, who know the ins and outs of the industry, and operate trains carrying millions of tons of freight and hazardous materials through your town, many of them your neighbors, do support this bill and the impact of not passing it means for you. This is not an attempt to gain any new jobs, we have two crew members on our trains today. Those of us who work in the industry just cannot sit by anymore without asking for your help to stop the railroad companies' attempt to cut corners on safety.

It is a threat to the safety of our citizens and a slap in the face to Georgians for railroads to even consider running trains -miles long, carrying millions of tons of explosive, destructive chemicals through your town with only one person on board.

Blocked crossings, Fatigue, Hazardous Chemicals, Train securement, National Security are just some of the reasons we must keep two members on board trains. -

*Have you ever been blocked at a Railroad crossing? Well however long it took to clear up, you can multiply by 100. Because without the second crew member, there is no one to manually separate the train, to open the crossings and let traffic through. What about ambulances, police, fire trucks, school buses, it may sound trivial until it's someone you care about in the back of that ambulance, stopped and delayed by a train. A train that is blocking the most direct route to the hospital, all because it wanted to save a few dollars by cutting the size of the train crew, seriously?

*Are you excited about Georgia's growing freight industry? Just a couple weeks ago in Committee we heard about the Georgia freight commission and the need to look at ways the state can accommodate an increase in rail traffic. And with the expansion of our great port, which is a good thing, the trains are getting longer and heavier. They are getting harder to operate and the longer they get the more they stop unexpectedly, blocking crossings. The longer and heavier they get, the harder they are to stop and the greater the chance for accident. The longer and heavier they get, the more product and hazardous chemicals they carry which broadens the impact zone of any derailment.

*Do you know what types chemicals are transported via rail through your town? We are not hauling baked goods. Explosives, corrosives, gases you cannot breathe are in some of those trains. They must be transported safely.

Steel tankers and Box cars, sitting on steel wheels, rolling on steel rails – they are long, they are heavy, and most of the time they are loaded with product or chemicals that if not transported properly, if one i is not dotted, or if one t is not crossed, they can bring disaster to a community.

*If you have ever worked shift work, you understand some of the fatigue issue that runs through our industry. But it's worse than that, because a huge portion of our workforce, the men and women operating the trains through your town are not on a set shift. We are on call all the time, called to work unexpectedly, at all hours of the night, seven days a week. And the dialogue between crew members, the accountability between myself and my co-worker, keeping each other alert and on task is the number one tool for fighting fatigue. If they remove the second crew member from the train, you will have 1 tired, person at the controls and that is unacceptable.

*In 2008 the Railroad industry was mandated by Congress to implement PTC – Positive Train Control. 11 years later and it is still not fully operational. PTC is in Overlay system and not designed to perform all the duties of the two crew members- further it does not work all the time- like any technology, it messes up. And with the addition of the control screen for this technology onto the engineers control stand, it pulls attention from the track ahead to the screen inside the cab.

*You may hear that enacting this type of legislation undermines collective bargaining between the workers and the railroad companies. Well, that's a cheap excuse to not do what is right. Safety is not negotiable. The safety of the public and the safety of workers should not be bargained at any cost.

*No one likes excessive regulation, but I think we all appreciate a regulation that could save a life? A seatbelt? A time limit to keep a truck driver from falling asleep at the wheel? A hands free while in your car policy? You may think that imposing a regulation on a business is different? Well, I would tell you that when a business runs through your backyard, you should have some say.

Keeping two crew members on board freight trains may not prevent every accident, but it will prevent some. As an experienced railroader I like the odds, don't allow railroad companies to gamble with the safety of our communities.

Tragedy is lurking around the corner if we as a state do not put our foot down. HB 190, Representative Rick William's Rail Safety Bill should be taken seriously and I respectfully ask that it be given a Vote in Committee.

Georgians deserve to know that freight hauled through their town, next to their house, under their city, and around their schools is done in the safest possible manner, which is by a crew of at least two people, no different than a pilot and a co-pilot.

Thank you for your time, I would be happy to answer any questions.