



February 16, 2023

State Representative Jay Edwards, Chair
State Representative Jeff LaRe, Vice Chair
House Finance Committee

State Representative Thomas Patton, Chair
House Finance Subcommittee on Transportation

RE: East Palestine Disaster and Railway Safety Amendment to the Transportation Budget

Dear Representatives Edwards, LaRe, and Patton:

We write regarding the recent catastrophic Norfolk Southern train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio. The derailment is an environmental disaster; the true magnitude and long-term impacts of which remain uncertain. As the State of Ohio and its people seek answers, it is incumbent upon the General Assembly to pursue lasting reforms that improve railway safety and instill public confidence in the state's commitment to preventing future railway catastrophes.

Given its timely and relevant nature, the biennial Transportation Budget is well-suited to swiftly advance additional railway safety measures. We, the undersigned members of the Ohio House of Representatives, express our support for and urge the adoption of the following amendments to the State Transportation Budget:

1. AM_135_0101 - Require at least a two-person railroad crew on trains
2. AM_135_0153 - Railway Wayside (Defect) Detector Systems: require PUCO to ensure these devices are operational, effective and up to date
3. AM_135- 0137 - Rail yard lighting and walkway safety requirements
4. AM_135_0143 - Railway Safety Zone
5. AM_135_0141 – Increase funding for the Ohio Rail Development Commission to \$15 million each fiscal year (a \$5 million a year increase of current levels)
6. AM_135_0029-2 - Require PUCO reporting when railroad blocks crossing;

Members of both caucuses have previously worked on railway safety legislation that seeks to protect the public, railway workers, and the environment. Many of these proposed amendments are not new ideas; they have been thoroughly vetted and earned bipartisan support over the years. Rail safety should always be a bipartisan issue; it matters to each of us and the communities we represent as lawmakers. With approximately 5,000 miles of track and 5,685 public grade crossings and 36 freight railroads operating within our state, Ohio has the fifth-highest rail traffic in the country.¹

¹ Public Utilities Commission of Ohio, 2019 Rail Statistics Report

The safe operation of freight and passenger trains is also vital to commerce, and we support efforts to keep train operations safe in the State of Ohio. It is imperative to ensure the safe movement of freight trains because freight trains transport time-sensitive commodities, including toxic and dangerous chemicals, through every region of Ohio. The manner in which railroad companies carry out operations has a profound impact on keeping our communities and railroad workers safe. We acknowledge that the Federal Government shoulders much of the responsibility to regulate railways. Nonetheless, the state plays a significant role in maintaining and improving the conditions of Ohio's railway system, one of the largest and densest rail networks in the nation.

This letter is neither an exhaustive list of solutions nor a comprehensive plan to address the derailment in East Palestine, but it is intended to at least serve as a starting point for a productive dialogue that responds to the legitimate concerns raised by so many Ohioans in recent days. Especially after this disaster, the citizens of Ohio should know that their representatives take their concerns very seriously and that we will act swiftly to enact reforms that reduce the likelihood of such a disaster from happening again in any of our many cities and towns along a railway line.

Thank you for your full and fair consideration of these timely rail safety amendments. We stand ready to work together and look forward to further discussions.

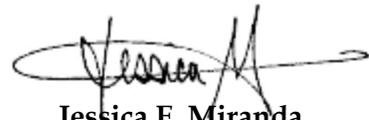
Sincerely,



C. Allison Russo
House Minority Leader
7th House District



Dontavius L. Jarrells
Asst. Minority Leader
1st House District

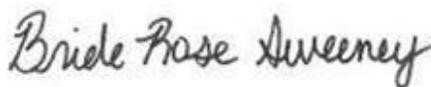


Jessica E. Miranda
Minority Whip
28th House District



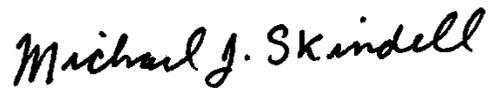
Tavia Galonski
Asst. Minority Whip

33rd House District

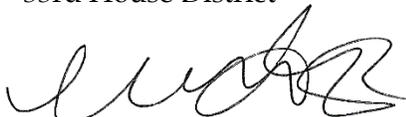


Bride Rose Sweeney
Ranking Member of Finance

16th House District



Michael J. Skindell
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation
13th House District



Michele Grim
Member
Subcommittee on Transportation
43rd House District



Willis E. Blackshear, Jr.
Member of Finance

38th House District



Dani Isaacsohn
Member of Finance

24th House District



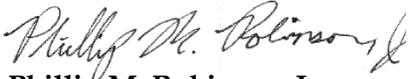
Beth Liston
Member of Finance
8th House District



Adam C. Miller
Member of Finance
6th House District



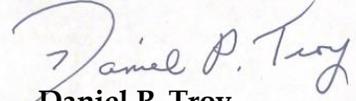
Joseph A. Miller, III
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53rd House District



Phillip M. Robinson, Jr.
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Cecil Thomas
Member of Finance
25th House District



Daniel P. Troy
Member of Finance
23rd House District



Munira Abdullahi
9th House District



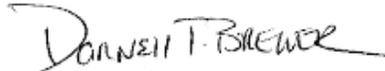
Rachel B. Baker
27th House District



Sean P. Brennan
14th House District



Juanita O. Brent
22nd House District



Darnell T. Brewer
18th House District



Richard D. Brown
5th House District



Richard Dell'Aquila
15th House District



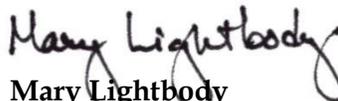
Sedrick Denson
26th House District



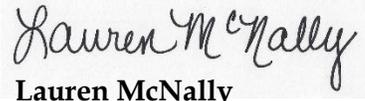
Elliot Forhan
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Latyna M. Humphrey
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59th House District



Ismail Mohamed
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