

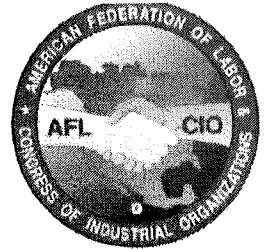


MAINE AFL-CIO

A Union of Unions Standing for Maine Workers

21 Gabriel Drive, Augusta, Maine 04330

(207) 622-9675
Visit our website: www.maineaflcio.org



President
Cynthia Phinney

Vice President
Grant Provost

Secretary Treasurer
Doug Born

Testimony of Adam Goode, Maine AFL-CIO Legislative & Political Director, In Support of LD 1015, "An Act to Require a Minimum of 2 Persons on a Crew for the Operation of Freight Trains"

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Adam Goode. I'm the Legislative and Political Director of the Maine AFL-CIO. We represent 40,000 working people in the state of Maine. We work to improve the lives and working conditions of our members and all working people. We testify in support of LD 1015.

In 2022, there were more than 1,100 train derailments across the country, according to data from the Federal Railroad Administration. That equates to an average of three train derailments every single day. Most of these were not big disasters, but they can obviously be costly in terms of delays and equipment repairs. Rail workers have been adamant that companies have been abandoning well-established safety practices in favor of policies that save money, such as increasing train lengths and introducing automation while reducing crew sizes.

A two-person crew provides crucial redundancy, as one crew member can assist the other with essential tasks, such as signal observation, brake checks, and hazard detection. In the event of an emergency, an unexpected health event or a malfunction, a second crew member can be immediately available to provide assistance, ensuring a safer and more efficient response.

Furthermore, a second crew member can serve as a crucial communication link, particularly during long and complex train movements. Clear communication and teamwork are essential for preventing accidents, and a two-person crew allows for better coordination and problem-solving. This is all in addition to the unfortunate reality that one crew member can always have an unexpected medical event.

Freight train staffing levels have been reduced significantly over the years. There used to be five crew members on a freight train, but over time that was reduced to two crew persons: an engineer who operates the locomotive, and a conductor who supervises the entire operation. As a cost saving measure, some railroads have reduced crews to just the engineer. Unions have even conceded to some downsizing, but reducing the size of an operating crew to a sole person is quite simply a public safety hazard.

This committee is well aware of the 2013 Lac-Mégantic train disaster where an unattended freight train, carrying crude oil, rolled down a hill and derailed downtown, resulting in a massive explosion and fire. The disaster resulted in 47 deaths and significant damage to the town's downtown area. In 2023 there was a well publicized derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, where a Norfolk Southern freight train carrying hazardous materials derailed, caught fire and sent smoke and particulate matter into the air. Crash runoff contaminated nearby waterways. Evacuations were ordered for residents in the surrounding area. Less than two months later,

Ohio Governor Mike DeWine signed legislation mandating that all freight trains operating in the state be staffed with at least two crew persons.

We don't have to wait for further disasters in Maine to learn from Ohio's example. This bill would help prevent derailments by requiring two-person crews on freight trains. Ground-based employees cannot respond to prevent dangerous derailments faster than employees already working inside the locomotive cab.

A rail accident can be very dangerous and the safety of having two humans in charge is so much better than one person who can't see behind the train, may be tired, have a medical event, or even a psychological crisis. Although the railroads are interstate travel, we can still mandate that when freight travels in Maine, we still have two people in charge rather than a lone engineer.

Requiring a minimum of two persons on each train crew will not only improve safety, but also enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the rail industry. It's a common-sense approach that ensures the safe and reliable movement of goods across our nation.