

Submitter: Rick Meis

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Transportation

Measure: SB16

Co-chairs Beyer and McLain, Committee members, I am Rick Meis from Halfway and I write this letter as testimony in support of SB-16, concerning rail transportation in Oregon.

Last night I read a long article discussing the railroad workers' union, the recently averted strike and the rail accident in Ohio. I think it is important to know that while it may have been necessary for President Biden to be a bit heavy handed in his handling of the planned rail strike, he did make a significant error as a person who supports rail transportation.

One of the major concerns of rail workers is the lackadaisical attitude of rail freight companies towards safety and the environment. The accident in Ohio is a disappointing way to learn how right rail workers are.

There grievances were headed by safety concerns ignored by the rail companies and the fact that the companies refuse to have enough workers on the job to make sure the work is done safely and efficiently. The President should have guaranteed that there would be a serious investigation into this problem.

A friend of mine suffered life-altering lung injury after a freight train had 19 cars derail in 1996 near Missoula, MT, and begin leaking liquid chlorine, which of course became a toxic gas, and other chemicals. I was involved with chlorine issues through my work at the time so I followed it closely. My friend was only one of many. And, yes, the rail company bypassed certain safety rules which made the accident worse. Had the accident been 20 miles east, it would have been devastating.

I think this bill would give Oregon a head start over much of the rest of the nation in beginning to address these issues. Rail transportation is an important part of our infrastructure that we must bring back up to snuff. It can be done safely and efficiently if the rail companies are so inclined. This is something that this bill could promote.

Thank you for your time.