

**April 7, 2025**

**From:** Kathleen Bisbikis, National President Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers & Trainmen  
Auxiliary - Wife, Daughter, and Aunt of Career Railroaders

**Re:** Written Testimony in Support of Oregon Rail Safety Bill S.B. No. 723

Dear Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit my written testimony in strong support of S.B. No. 723—the Oregon Rail Safety Bill.

Over the years, railroad carriers have drastically reduced crew sizes, bringing operations down to the bare minimum: one federally licensed and certified conductor and one engineer. The engineer operates the train, while the conductor is responsible for managing the cars, coordinating with dispatchers, crews, local yard offices, and—critically—first responders and the public when emergencies arise.

Carriers often downplay the risks associated with reducing crew sizes further, but I urge you not to be misled. The implementation of two-person crew safety bills in each state, including Oregon, is essential to public safety. Without them, communities across the country—including your own—are left vulnerable to accidents, environmental disasters, and preventable tragedies. As trains become longer and carry increasingly hazardous materials, the risks only grow.

In the event of an accident, for example, a collision between a train and a vehicle—it is the conductor who gets off the train to assist. They locate the injured, call first responders, and help keep the public safe until help arrives. The engineer cannot leave the train unattended without first securing it, making the conductor's role not just important but indispensable. Without a second crew member, such situations would descend into chaos. Shockingly, some carriers have suggested that they would rather absorb the cost of lawsuits from preventable fatalities than pay the salary of a second crew member. This is unconscionable and underscores the urgent need for legislation like S.B. 723.

I want to share a personal story that illustrates just how vital a two-person crew can be. My husband was operating a train through the treacherous Feather River Canyon in California—a high-grade, twisting stretch of track—when a massive rockslide occurred. From his unique vantage point in the locomotive cab, he spotted a giant boulder directly in the path of the train. He immediately alerted the engineer and initiated an emergency stop. Had the engineer been operating alone, he wouldn't have seen the boulder in time to react, likely resulting in a derailment and sending the train plummeting into the canyon below. The slight difference in their line of sight—just 8 to 10 feet apart—meant the difference between disaster and safety.

A derailment in that canyon would not only have risked lives but could have contaminated the surrounding waterways and inflicted millions of dollars in damage. Incidents like this are not rare—they are real, and they are preventable with proper crew staffing.

On behalf of my family and the many members of the BLET Auxiliary I represent across the nation, I urge you: do not put the lives of Oregon's people at risk. A two-person crew on every locomotive is not a luxury—it is a necessity. It should not be a matter of debate but a standard of safety we demand for every community.

Supporting S.B. 723 is a vote for the safety of your constituents, your economy, your environment, and the families of those who keep America's freight moving day and night.

Sincerely,

**Kathleen Bisbikis**

National President

BLET Auxiliary