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Rhode Island Works Best When We Say UNION YES.

March 12, 2026

Chairman Jacob Bissailon
 Senate Housing and Municipal Government Committee
 Rhode Island State House
 Providence, RI 02903

RE: Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 2913 - Minimum crews required.

Dear Chair Bissailon and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the 80,000 union members of the Rhode Island AFL-CIO and our affiliated local unions, I write in support of Senate Bill 2913 introduced by Senator Vargas. This bill will require any train or light engine used to carry freight must be operated by at least two (2) persons.

SB-2913 does not create a new operational requirement, it codifies the existing industry safety standard. For decades, the safe operation of freight trains has relied on the “Rule of Two”, a certified locomotive engineer and a certified conductor working together to get the train safely, where it needs to be. Two-person crews are the longstanding practice across the freight rail industry and remain the standard today.

This legislation is a proactive measure to preserve that safety standard in statute before cost-cutting pressures erode it. As rail corporations pursue workforce reductions to increase their profits, proposals to move toward single-person crews place workers and the public at unnecessary risk. Codifying the two-person requirement ensures that Rhode Island does not wait for a preventable tragedy before acting.

Freight rail operations are complex and inherently hazardous. Trains traveling through Rhode Island can stretch up to two miles in length, weigh thousands of tons, and frequently carry hazardous materials. They move through densely populated communities, across public crossings, and alongside critical infrastructure. Operating such equipment safely requires constant vigilance and coordination.

The engineer and conductor perform distinct, safety-critical responsibilities. They monitor signals and track conditions, communicate with dispatch, respond to mechanical issues, secure trains, protect crossings, and react to emergencies. The “Rule of Two” in safety-sensitive transportation systems is not excessive or redundant, it is foundational to the health and safety of workers and communities. In aviation and other sectors, two qualified operators are required because layered safety protections are paramount.

Thirteen states have already enacted similar laws to preserve two-person freight crews, recognizing that waiting for federal action or corporate restraint is not sufficient. Senate Bill 2913 allows Rhode Island to take a commonsense, proactive step to safeguard its residents and its workforce.

By codifying what is already the current industry standard, this legislation reinforces Rhode Island’s commitment to public safety, worker safety, and responsible rail operations. It ensures that decisions affecting community safety are guided by sound policy, not short-term cost savings. For these reasons, the Rhode Island AFL-CIO urges your support of Senate Bill 2913.

Respectfully submitted,

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