

# LiUNA!

## Michigan Laborers District Council

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### **Testimony from Jonathan Byrd: Michigan Laborers Union**

**RE: HB 5286**

My name is Jonathan Byrd, and I am the Director of External Affairs for the Michigan Laborers District Council, which includes seven local unions that represent all 83 counties in Michigan.

Let me first start by thanking Chairman O'Malley and the House Committee on Transportation for allowing me to discuss proposed legislation to increase safety measures on road construction sites.

In principle, and substantially by detail, the Michigan Laborers District Council, and the 13,000 Union Construction Laborers we represent, support House Bill 5286.

Before going into the specific elements of HB 5286 that our Union supports, I would like to provide the members a brief description of our training system. Our Union takes great pride in being a trade that provides state-of-the-art training to all our Members. Our Training Fund spends millions of dollars every year, at no cost to the State, to ensure that a highly-skilled workforce is available to our signatory contractors. We are consistently ready and willing to meet the needs of the industry.

Ensuring our Members have the proper training to do the job safely is a key objective of our Union. However, no amount of training from our esteemed instructors can ensure that our Members are safe on the job, especially on road construction sites.

Over the last decade, there were an average of approximately 14 worker fatalities in Michigan work zones per year, with a range of 8-25 fatalities per year. During this time period, we have seen a near doubling of the average annual number of fatalities, rising from approximately 9 per year in 2010 to nearly 18 per year in 2020. In fact, in just the fall of 2020, five road workers were killed and three were injured. Two of the members killed were our members. Nearly two months ago, on August 27<sup>th</sup>, a member of my local, my union brother, Reason Tillman-Morgan was killed while working on a bridge in Van Buren County. This tragedy could likely have been avoided with better safety precautions in place. I especially want to thank Representative Griffin who immediately reached out to offer help and support to the family.

Our Union views all of these occurrences as unacceptable, as every Member of our Union should have the confidence that when they go to work in the morning, they will be able to return home safely at night to their families.

HB 5286 seeks to address this issue by instructing the Michigan Department of Transportation to install digital speed boards on Michigan State Highway construction projects. One of the common reasons we hear that drivers speed through construction projects is that they are not aware of the reduced speed zone or do not believe work is currently going on in the project. Installation of these digital speed boards in the areas just before work is actively being conducted would better inform motorists of the upcoming work zone, as well as better alert them of the lawful speed limit.

In comparison to the current signage implemented in work zones, these digital speed boards are larger, brighter, and more movable. The evidence from the Indiana Department of Transportation (InDOT) on the usage of digital speed boards over the last twenty years shows that the speed boards reduce average driver speeds through work zones by 5-7mph, are able to provide e-alerts to drivers, and significantly improve data collection, in addition to the aforementioned benefits. This data proves that adding digital speed boards to active worksite zones would improve the effectiveness of MDOT's communications to drivers as well as lessen the severity of any potential accidents.

To summarize, the Michigan Laborers believe that House Bill 5286 is a positive step toward ensuring worksites on Michigan's highways are safer, for both workers and drivers.

I would like to again thank the committee for allowing me to address this legislation. On behalf of the Michigan Laborers, I thank you all for your interest and look forward to providing our expertise on this issue and any others that the committee may examine over this session.

Thank you again and I am happy to answer any questions that the committee may have at this time.