



Michigan Laborers District Council

Feel the Power

Testimony from Jonathan Byrd: Michigan Laborers Union RE: HB 5272

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 Filler and the House Committee on Judiciary for allowing me to discuss proposed legislation to increase safety measures on road construction sites. In addition, I'd also like to thank Representative Eisen for his relentless advocacy of this legislation and dedication to keeping workers safe.

In principle, and substantially by detail, the Michigan Laborers District Council, and the 13,000 Union Construction Laborers we represent, support House Bill 5272.

Before going into the specific elements of HB 5272 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 was 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 three months ago, on August 27th, 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 5272 seeks to address this issue by allowing for the use of an automated speed enforcement system in work zones only. In addition, this legislation requires signage to notify motorists of the upcoming photo-enforced work zone.

Some of you may be familiar with these signs and the automatic speed enforcement if you have traveled to other States, including Illinois, Pennsylvania, and Maryland to name a few. These States have seen a significant decline in speeding in work zones once programs like these are implemented.

If other States can take these steps to make work zones safer, so can Michigan. I'd like to thank both MDOT and MSP for their diligence in researching best practices and also would like to thank MITA and our signatory contractors for their interest in helping to make work zones safer.

To summarize, the Michigan Laborers believe that House Bill 5272 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.