

## Testimony

On behalf of the State Association for Transportation Insurance (SAFTI), I thank you for this opportunity to present testimony relative to HB 299.

My name is Alan Blahovec, and I am the Executive Director of Westmoreland County Transit Authority (WCTA). I am also the volunteer board treasurer of the State Association for Transportation Insurance (SAFTI), a statewide transit industry insurance pool that has saved our members millions of dollars in insurance premiums while providing better insurance coverage and significant improvements in risk management practices and continuously lowering accidents, incidents, and most importantly costs.

Every day, our industry helps individuals and strengthens our communities. Our bus service helps people get where they need to go.

- We help working people get to their jobs.
- We help older people age in place instead of having to move out of their home.
- We help people with disabilities maintain their independence.
- We help college students get to class so that they can avoid the added expense of owning a car.

The safety of our customers and our employees are at the core of all transit agencies' daily concerns. For us, this "precious cargo" is an important reminder of our strong commitment to safety for each and every trip. That is the message I would like to convey to you today. Safety protocols and regulations are not a new concept for public transportation and our valued employees. Transit agencies across the Commonwealth operate under the most rigorous, industry-specific safety protocols and programs – more in fact than any other agency, municipal authority, or local government entity.

Transit is subject to a myriad of rules and regulations related to safety, health, the environment, and transportation under the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Environmental Protection, and the U.S. Department of Health, as well as the many complimentary agencies here in our Commonwealth.

For example, under the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), we are required to comply with comprehensive Safety Management Systems. As part of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law yet additional requirements were levied against transit agencies called the Public Transportation Agency Safety Plan (PTASP) requiring labor management safety committee to investigate workplace incidents, numerous training requirements, drug and alcohol programs, and much more. As an example of our commitment to safety and our efforts to go above and beyond, please note that the FTA ceded the decision regarding a requirement for physicals for bus drivers to the states. Pennsylvania chose not to require this, but members of SAFTI *do* require physicals for bus drivers.

In addition to these comprehensive protocols, transit agencies routinely work together at the national and state level for continuing education, best practices, development and enforcement of

modern safety rules and regulations, and methods to hold the industry responsible for the safety of our workforce and customers. Safety is what we do. We take it seriously, and we always will.

As you see in my written testimony, 29 years ago, we created a workplace safety and collision prevention program called *SAFTI*. As the name implies, the members created these series of standards regarding safety and operational policies for injury and collision risk and prevention. SAFTI is an insurance pool, one with standards more rigorous than federal and state regulatory agencies require. We manage accident trends. We require retraining based upon those trends. We also track “near misses” and use that information as teachable moments – adjusting our training and best practices.

At some agencies for example, new drivers get 4 weeks or 160 hours of training before they drive a bus in revenue service. And that is if they already have the Commercial Driver’s License. If we have to train them to get their CDL, it is an additional two weeks on top of the four weeks.

In SAFTI, each member holds the others accountable. This risk management mitigation has resulted in enhanced safety practices and protocols with expenses 30%-50% less than private sector options due to the minimized losses. As a result of our SAFTI program, we continue to perform better than the industry averages regarding workplace fatalities, injuries, and illnesses.

Perhaps the most impressive statistic is that since SAFTI’s inception, in the last 30 years, we have only experienced ONE workplace fatality— a statistically significant note for consideration.

According to national statistics, from 2016-2019, there were 288 workplace fatalities in the transit and ground transportation industry. In 2019, there were 5,333 workplace fatalities across all industries.

To put it another way, we have experienced 1 fatality in over 142,700,000 million work hours. By OSHA statistics, the average for public transportation across the country is 48 workplace fatalities over the same time period for the same work hours.

Compared to other industries, we should be experiencing 1.6 fatalities per year, not one single fatality over a 30-year period.

In costs per \$100 of driver payroll, we have reduced the loss number by 2/3 over 30 years – which means we have both less frequency and severity of the incidents within SAFTI member’s workforce.

I am exceptionally proud of the success of our program and what it has done to protect the health and well-being of those who work in public transportation and those who benefit from our services. As an industry, we continue to prioritize safety and the adherence to the extensive, industry-specific regulations as well as the policies and best practices of our own effective programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on this important issue.

## Written Testimony

Alan Blahovec  
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On behalf of the State Association for Transportation Insurance (SAFTI), I thank you for this opportunity to present testimony to the Subcommittee on Workers Compensation and Protection.

My name is Alan Blahovec, and I am the Executive Director of Westmoreland County Transit Authority (WCTA). I am also the volunteer board chair of the State Association for Transportation Insurance (SAFTI), a statewide transit industry insurance pool that has saved our members millions of dollars in insurance premiums while providing better insurance coverage and significant improvements in risk management practices all while continuously lowering accidents, incidents, and costs.

We understand that the committee desires to learn more about workplace safety for public sector employees. As a public sector employer, transit agencies regard safety of its workers and customers as its chief priority.

Every day, our industry helps individuals and strengthens our communities. Our bus service helps people get where they need to go.

- We help working people get to their jobs.
- We help older people age in place instead of having to move out of their home.
- We help people with disabilities maintain their independence.
- We help college students get to class so that they can avoid the added expense of owning a car.

The safety of our customers and our employees are at the core of all transit agencies' daily concerns. For us, this "precious cargo" is an important reminder of our strong commitment to safety for each and every trip. And perhaps that is the message I would like to convey to you today. Safety protocols and regulations are not a new concept for public transportation and our valued employees. Transit agencies across the Commonwealth operate under the most rigorous, industry-specific safety protocols and programs – more in fact than any other agency or municipal authority or local government entity.

Transit is subject to a myriad of rules and regulations related to safety, health, the environment, and transportation under the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, U.S. Department of Environmental Protection, and the U.S. Department of Health, as well as the many complimentary agencies here in our Commonwealth.

FTA mandates Safety Management Systems (SMS). SMS is unique to public transportation and demands strict accident prevention programs, reporting requirements, training initiatives and yearly analysis of safety programs. In 2022, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law required even more regulatory, safety requirements including a formal Public Transportation Agency Safety

Plan (PTSAP) which includes front line participation on safety committees, data tracking and additional data keeping measures for each system.

In 1991, Congress passed the Omnibus Transportation Employee Testing Act requiring transit agencies to implement drug and alcohol testing of safety-sensitive transportation employees.

In addition to these comprehensive protocols, transit agencies routinely work together at the national and state level for continuing education, best practices, development and enforcement of modern safety rules and regulations, and methods to hold the industry responsible for the safety of our workforce and customers. Safety is what we do. We take it seriously, and we always will.

Perhaps beyond listing for the Committee the extensive federal regulatory compliance, I should further explain the ingenuity and responsibility to safety our industry holds as a standard. More than 29 years ago, the State Association Fund for Transportation Insurance (SAFTI) was created. SAFTI is a pooled loss, payment organization, with peer regulation to secure favorable rates with third-party oversight. SAFTI is an insurance pool, one with standards more rigorous than federal and state regulatory agencies require. We manage accident trends. We require retraining based upon those trends. We also track “near misses” and use that information as teachable moments – adjusting our training and best practices.

Again, the goal in creating this entity was to agree to, and adopt, a series of safety standards by which all members could abide and execute. The standards include policies that address operational areas of injury and collision risk and determine protocols for safety and collision prevention. SAFTI’s Environmental Health & Safety Policy Standard purpose was to protect lives – the lives of our employees, our customers, and the traveling public. The program provides extensive education and monitoring procedures.

1. **Job hazard analyses** for all company positions to identify injury risk so that appropriate steps can be taken to mitigate the same.
2. **Written programs** for emergency access and evacuation; hazard communication; bloodborne pathogens; air quality/respirator use/ vehicle lockout/tagout procedures; forklift operations; management and facility controls for maintaining a safe workplace.
3. **Training:** new hire/initial/orientation training on applicable topics is required. Quarterly refresher training is also required, as well as remedial training following observed or demonstrated unsafe behaviors. This training is in addition to new training required by the Federal Transit Administration.
4. Availability for and the encouragement of **employee feedback** regarding unsafe working conditions.
5. **Timely response by management to remedy any unsafe conditions.** Documentation of all responses to employee suggestions and implementation of any improvements implemented is required.

Member companies are also required to adhere to standards regarding driver hiring, training, and management (including discipline), collision response and investigation, and vehicle maintenance. Educational standards are also required in these standards for management personnel responsible for driver hiring and management and collision investigation.

These standards focus on vehicle operational safety, providing a system designed to:

1. Hire demonstrated safe drivers and provide them with necessary knowledge and skills to operate fleet vehicles safely through comprehensive initial and ongoing/recurring training.
2. Investigate collisions to establish casual factors and take appropriate disciplinary and remedial training actions when drivers were found to contribute to the cause.
3. Inspect and service fleet vehicles on specific schedules to ensure that mechanical issues resulting in breakdowns or collisions were minimized.

The result of such standards:

1. **Annual audits** for compliance and adherence to standards.
2. **Annual facility inspection by a third-party provider.**
3. **One workplace fatality in 30 years.**
4. **Below average cost per vehicle per loss** from when the pool started due to risk management strategies.
5. **Risk management mitigation has resulted in costs 30-50% less than the private sector** due to minimized workplace safety losses.
6. **Retraining for workplace safety incidents.**

Today, the SAFTI program includes 2,682 full-time employees and 478 part-time employees.

Perhaps the most impressive statistic is that since SAFTI's inception, in the last 29 years, we have only experienced ONE workplace fatality— a statistically significant note for consideration.

According to national statistics, from 2016-2019, there were 288 workplace fatalities in the transit and ground transportation industry. In 2019, there were 5,333 workplace fatalities across all industries. I have used the 2016-2019 timeframe for reference because data from 2020-2021 may be skewed due to COVID reduction in service.

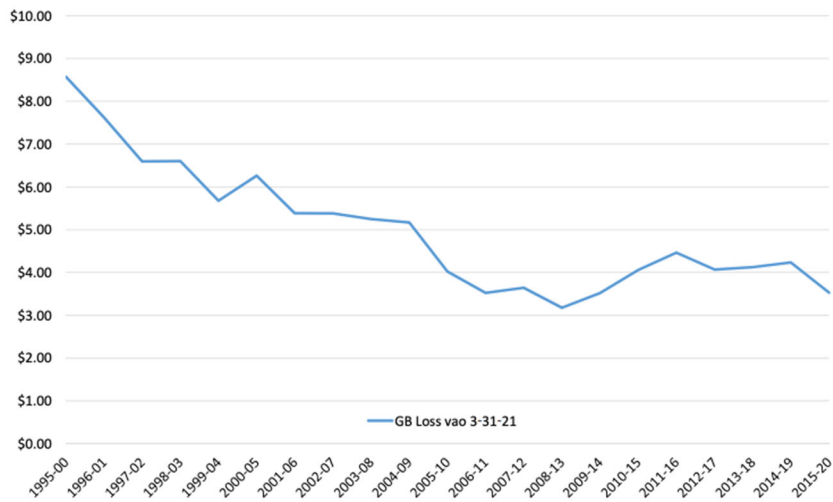
To put it another way, we have experienced 1 fatality in over 142,700,000 million work hours. By OSHA statistics, the average for public transportation across the country is 48 workplace fatalities over the same time period for the same work hours.

Compared to other industries, we should be experiencing 1.6 fatalities per year, not one single fatality over a 29-year period.

In costs per \$100 of driver payroll, we have reduced the loss number by 2/3 over 27 years (based upon audited data) – which means we have both less frequency and severity of the incidents within SAFTI member's workforce.

Graphic: Demonstrates the 5-year rolling average of losses compared to driver payroll over the past 20 years.

**SAFTI WC - 5 Year Rolling Average Losses per \$100 Driver Payroll last 20 Complete Years per GB valuation as of 03-31-21**



In your deliberations as you consider workplaces safety for all Pennsylvanians, we submit that our efforts go above and beyond both in our own industry and across all industries. We have an outstanding record of compliance to extensive regulation from the federal government and the robust, industry specific and proven programs already in place compared to not only the private sector, but also other public sector employers. Our SAFTI program is a model of the commitment to the lives and well-being of our transit employees and customers.

On behalf of the members of SAFTI, as well as the transit industry across Pennsylvania, thank you again for this opportunity to discuss workplace safety. It is our sincere hope this information conveys the vastness of our commitment to safety. If we may be of service in your deliberations, please consider us a resource for the Committee.