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Labor, Environmentalists, and Community Groups Applaud Action to Make New Jersey Rail Safer Despite Heavy Industry Opposition

TRENTON, NJ – In the final week of his administration, Governor Murphy signed S3389, which creates some of, if not the strongest, regulations on railroad operators in the country. Under the new law, rail companies transporting hazardous materials will be required to have two-person crews on all trains, take active measures to install wayside detectors, submit bridge condition reports to the state, and allow for worker inspections at facilities. These measures were supported by a diverse coalition of stakeholders including labor unions, environmental groups, and community members who live near railroad tracks. While advocates and experts pushed for even greater regulation in the aftermath of multiple major accidents in recent memory, including in East Palestine, Ohio (2023) and Paulsboro, New Jersey (2012), the steps taken by the state have been called common sense actions that will decrease the likelihood of a catastrophic event. These measures are especially important given the inaction at the federal level. Railroad companies have lobbied against any additional safety regulations and while successful at the federal level, were unable to kill this bill in Trenton.

“For more than a decade, WEC has partnered with allies to advance comprehensive rail safety reforms, and this new law marks an important first step toward reducing the risk that emergency responders, communities, and rail workers will face another catastrophic derailment like those in East Palestine or Paulsboro, said **Debra Coyle, Executive Director, NJ Work Environment Council**. “We are grateful to the bill’s sponsors and the Governor for standing firm against well-funded opposition and choosing to do what is right for the people of New Jersey.”

“This is a proud day for railroaders, for our families, and for the communities we serve,” said **Ron Sabol, NJ State Legislative Director for SMART-TD**. “This legislation delivers meaningful safety improvements for railroad employees, passengers, and communities across New Jersey. We are deeply grateful to Governor Murphy for his leadership and his unwavering commitment to making our state safer. From day one, he has understood that stronger safety standards protect workers and the public alike, and his consistent support for SMART-TD over two terms has made a lasting difference. That legacy will endure well beyond today.”

"In 2013, a train carrying volatile Bakken crude oil in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, derailed and exploded like a bomb, killing 47 children and adults. Similar trains carry Bakken crude and other hazardous materials through New Jersey. Concerned residents organized the Coalition to Ban Unsafe Oil Trains, and legislation to prevent such tragedies was introduced in 2014 by then Senator Loretta Weinberg. Each year we have rallied to mark the anniversary of the tragedies in Lac-Mégantic, Paulsboro, NJ, and in East Palestine, OH, and to press for the passage of the hazmat rail safety bill. It has been a long and difficult fight, as we are up against the power of the rail corporations who were able to get both Democrats and Republicans to block its passage - until now! We applaud the many NJ residents, union members, and state legislators who participated in this important effort. We will continue to work for additional safety measures," said **Paula Rogovin, Cofounder, Coalition to Ban Unsafe Oil Trains.**

"This has been a long road since I first introduced this bill several years ago," said **Former State Senator Loretta Weinberg.** Thank you to the advocates and my successors in the legislature for moving it forward year after year. It is a "first step" to keeping New Jersey residents safer when they have these railways run thru their towns.

"New Jersey lawmakers put people over profit by protecting the 3.6 million New Jerseyans who live near potential hazmat rail incidents," said **Alex Ambrose, policy analyst at New Jersey Policy Perspective** and author of the report [Millions of New Jerseyans at Risk from Hazardous Materials Transported by Rail](#). "While the federal government considers rolling back critical safety measures, this law advances common-sense policies that protect both workers and residents. New Jerseyans can all breathe a little easier knowing these guardrails will be in place."

"Every day, trains carrying hazardous chemicals through our communities are playing Russian Roulette with our safety and the environment. The freight train that derailed and exploded in East Palestine was on its way to South Jersey. And Paulsboro is still haunted by its own train derailment – and vinyl chloride release – in November 2012 that evacuated the town and could have been much worse," said **Doug O'Malley, Director of Environment New Jersey.** "We applaud Gov. Murphy for signing this rail safety bill (S3389/A4460) to reduce the risks on our rails which will require common-sense safety measures and more staffing as the right first step. Hope is not a strategy – and we need to make sure we don't stick our heads in the sand and cross our fingers that New Jersey is not the site of the next rail disaster. We thank Sen. Patrick Diegnan and Asm. Clinton Calabrese for their leadership to make this bill a reality."

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