

Statement of John Renwick

President/Business Agent, Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 568

H.B. 1082

My name is John Renwick. I work for Erie Metropolitan Transit Authority (EMTA). I have been a bus operator for 28 years and I currently serve as the president and business agent for Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) Local 568.

Our International Union and experts on this panel have submitted testimony about House Bill 1082 and why it's critical to provide OSHA protections to public sector workers.

I'd prefer to spend my time telling you about my hunting partner and EMTA colleague Jake Schwab. Jake was a bus mechanic.

At 11:45 a.m. on November 4, 2014, chaos broke out at the EMTA bus garage. Out of nowhere, there were mechanics running around and screaming, trying to get management to call 911. I ran in and saw something that I will remember for the rest of my life: my friend Jake lying in a pool of blood.

An air suspension system Jake was working on exploded and a metal disk flew into the left side of his brain. He died five days later.

Jake was working with the wrong tools on an unfamiliar bus from another agency in a garage that was and still is a hazardous place to go to work.

That day, I called the Erie OSHA office. I explained to them what had happened. It was a very brief conversation: they told me that there was nothing they could do. No jurisdiction, they said.

Almost two years later, there has been no official explanation of the cause of the incident, which would seem to be necessary to prevent it from happening again. The so-called "investigation" from the insurance company was a sham.

Was it Jake's fault? Was it equipment failure? We will never know because no one seems to care. Public employees are like second class citizens here in Pennsylvania.

Our mechanics continue to work in an unsafe environment, breathing in fumes all day. I've got current pictures showing obvious safety hazards in our shop. No one seems to care. Do we need another mechanic to die before someone does something about this? Would lawmakers pay attention more if it was a transit passenger that died as a result of something that went wrong in our maintenance shop?

And it's not just the mechanics. Pennsylvania bus drivers are routinely assaulted during the course of their duties. We forego water and starve our internal organs throughout our day because we do not have enough time to use the restroom at the end of our shifts. Over the years, our bladders and kidneys pay the price.

The buses we call home for hours and hours each day have not been redesigned in twenty years -- an ergonomic nightmare leading to back, neck, and shoulder problems. The hours are not pretty either -- most shifts either start around 5:00 a.m. or end around 7:00 p.m. Sleeping disorders are commonplace.

Why does no one care?

Public employees, including transit workers, need OSHA protections. Someone needs to tell Harrisburg that it's the year 2016, not 1916!

It's time for Pennsylvania to pass this bill!

We mourn for Jake and remember all of those who have been injured or lost their lives simply trying to provide for themselves and support their families.

Thank you.