

# **Durbin Expresses Support For Railway Safety Act Of 2023 In Speech On The Senate Floor**

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WASHINGTON – U.S. Senate Majority Whip Dick Durbin (D-IL) today took to the Senate floor to sound the alarm on railway safety after news broke this morning of a third rail accident involving Norfolk Southern. The accident, in which a Norfolk Southern train collided with a dump truck in Cleveland and killed a rail employee, is the third incident in one month involving the rail company. In his speech, Durbin urged his colleagues to prioritize railway safety before another community loses a loved one or is plagued with the environmental impacts of a derailment.

“These three rail accidents in just one month – one of them a catastrophic derailment – have sent a grave and blaring signal that we need to do more to protect American communities from hazardous freight rail shipments,” Durbin began. “The need for greater rail safety is urgent, especially in my state of Illinois. Chicago, Illinois, is the busiest rail hub in the United States... If we ignore the warnings from East Palestine and Springfield, Ohio, it’s only a matter of time until the next deadly derailment.”

Durbin acknowledged that the federal government quickly stepped in to address the train derailment in East Palestine, but he further emphasized the need to prevent derailments before they occur. As rail traffic has climbed, the rail industry has gravitated toward larger freight trains, yet, the federal government has failed to keep up with the shift and properly strengthen federal safety regulations for trains of this size.

“In East Palestine, the government has responded quickly. Federal agencies were on the ground within hours, and are still there today... But we also need to do more to prevent train derailments and accidents in the first place so that more communities don’t find themselves facing the same dangers and uncertainty as East Palestine,” Durbin said.

“Freight rail traffic has increased in recent decades and it continues to grow. At the same time, freight companies have moved to larger and longer trains to increase profits. But federal regulations have not kept pace with the changing rail industry. That’s the problem,” Durbin continued. “While derailments are down overall since the 1970s, the number of train accidents per mile has actually increased... Instead of investing adequately in safety and their workers, freight rail companies have cut staff dramatically and fought to dismantle safety regulations... The result is greater danger, more congestion, and blocked rail crossings in communities across the country.”

Durbin went on to express his support for the bipartisan *Railway Safety Act of 2023*, which was authored by U.S. Senators Sherrod Brown (D-OH) and JD Vance (R-OH). The legislation would implement commonsense changes to safety standards and force freight railroads to comply. The *Railway Safety Act* would increase how frequently the temperature of wheel bearings must be checked, implement safety procedures for trains carrying hazardous material, require that trains hauling hazardous materials have two trained crewmembers on board, and provide funding for hazmat training for first responders.

“The disaster in East Palestine appears, finally, to have produced a bipartisan consensus that change is needed, and it is. My colleagues from Ohio, Senators Brown and Vance, have introduced a bipartisan bill that would make several important, commonsense changes and force freight railroads to improve the safety of their operations,” Durbin said. “I support these efforts, and I hope the Senate will pass the bill soon.”

At the end of his remarks, Durbin also urged the rail industry to reexamine its feeble paid sick leave policies that have lined corporations' pockets at the expense of the wellbeing of rail workers' health.

“This past December, Congress approved a labor agreement that gives rail workers the largest wage increase in 50 years. But most of the railroads balked at providing their workers with even one day of paid sick leave per year so that they can take care of themselves and their families” Durbin said. “It’s time for change.”

Durbin concluded his speech by reflecting on his family’s time working for a railroad and reiterating the need to prioritize safety in the industry to protect workers and the communities the trains operate in.

“Working for railroads is a tradition in my family. I grew up in East St. Louis, Illinois. Both of my parents worked for the New York Central Railroad. My two brothers and I also worked for the same railroad. I know from personal experience that many railroad jobs are physically demanding, and they can be dangerous... We can’t take all of the risks out of rail transport. But we must reduce unnecessary risk,” Durbin said. “The bipartisan Brown-Vance bill strikes the right balance. We should pass it without delay.”

Video of Durbin’s floor speech is available [here](#).

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