

TESTIMONY OF SENATOR ROBERT P. CASEY, JR. OF PENNSYLVANIA  
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS  
HEARING ON PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE  
WAKE OF THE NORFOLK SOUTHERN TRAIN DERAILMENT AND CHEMICAL  
RELEASE IN EAST PALESTINE, OHIO  
MARCH 9, 2023

Thank you, Chairman Carper, Ranking Member Capito, and Members of the Committee for holding today's hearing. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak before you today. I also want to thank my colleagues next to me, Senators Brown and Vance—as well as my Pennsylvania colleagues Senator Fetterman and Representative Deluzio—for their continued partnership working in the aftermath of this derailment.

Much of the attention has—rightfully—been focused on the impacts of East Palestine, Ohio. But the center of this derailment occurred just 1,000 feet from the Pennsylvania border. I am here today to lift up the voices and stories of residents, first responders, and businesses in Darlington Township, Pennsylvania.

This past Monday, I visited Darlington Township in Beaver County and saw firsthand how the community has been rocked by this tragedy. Approximately 135 households in Beaver County were advised to evacuate after the derailment. Even more residents across Beaver and Lawrence Counties saw a toxic plume cover their lands.

In the direct aftermath of the derailment, I have heard from first responders, including Police Officer Dan Frederick, about their experiences on the ground the night of the derailment. Dan shared with me, “As a first responder, particularly a police officer, we all know and understand the risks that come with our line of work. However, we usually know, or have an idea of when something, or someone can kill us. When I left my two boys, and wife to respond to the “hot zone”, I was expecting us to be informed of exactly what was on that train, and the potential health hazards...To say I was scared the night of the derailment is an understatement.”

I have also heard from residents about their fears of long-term health impacts and the safety of their families and communities moving forward. Jenny Santana of Darlington Township shared: “I want to know if it's safe to stay here. All of these people deserve honest answers. And nobody is getting them. If it were your children's lives in question, how far away for you would be safe? ... Please hold them accountable and make them help us.”

Farmers in the region are seeking clear and direct guidance from the Department of Agriculture. They want the certainty that their crops and livestock are safe and free of contamination and that the food supply and their livelihoods are safe. Farmer and Township Chair, Mike Carreon, aptly stated: “We along with countless other local agricultural producers have years invested in telling our stories and developing relationships with our customers. The stories of working in harmony with nature to produce a superior product. This story was ripped to pieces Feb 6. It is now our responsibility to do damage control for Norfolk Southern's negligence, while absorbing revenue loss of canceled orders. The economics of our industry is very emotionally driven. Emotions that

are now being driven by perception and lack of information. We need testing. We need factual information. We needed this yesterday, and we still are not seeing a response.”

Residents are scared, particularly of the potential exposures that could lead to health problems for themselves and their families. We need constant testing—potentially for years to come—for hazardous materials in these communities. I am pushing for better answers about what exposures may have happened and what we need to do to address the concerns we are hearing from the local community.

The people of Darlington didn’t ask for this disaster, nor do they deserve it. They don’t deserve the physical, emotional, and financial toll the derailment has taken.

They are suffering from the consequences of Norfolk Southern’s crisis, and these problems aren’t going away overnight. But let’s be clear about who is at fault and who needs to step up and do their part: Norfolk Southern has a moral and legal responsibility to the people of Darlington and East Palestine to help them recover for years to come. We want to see details of that commitment, we want to see action, we want to see results, right now.

I have pressed Norfolk Southern on a number of issues since the derailment, but I want to raise one issue in particular. Along with Senator Fetterman and Representative Deluzio, I’ve pushed Norfolk Southern to focus on the basic help that Darlington Township residents are going to need. And though they responded quickly, their response was inadequate in meeting the needs of Pennsylvania residents.

So I’m here today challenging Norfolk Southern to step up. Commit to supporting Ohio and Pennsylvania residents, not just in the immediate aftermath, but for years to come. And—support our bill. Help us make sure this never happens again. Our bipartisan Railway Safety Act will make freight rail safer and hold rail companies accountable for putting communities and workers in harm’s way—with multimillion dollar penalties—rather than the tens of thousands that they face today. Norfolk Southern should stand up today and say they support our bill. That would be a good start to show that they never want this to happen again. And if they don’t, Pennsylvania and Ohio residents deserve to know why. So Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for having this hearing and thank you for providing us with the opportunity to speak on behalf of our constituents.