

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 21, 2017

The Honorable Elaine Chao
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, Southeast
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary Chao:

On Monday, an Amtrak train derailed onto a busy interstate highway in DuPont, Washington. This tragedy reminds us of the urgent need to improve rail safety, including the nationwide implementation of positive train control (PTC) technology, as mandated by Congress. We write requesting an update on the status of railroads' compliance with the pending deadline for implementation and your efforts to carry out other rail safety measures.

The NTSB has been urging the adoption of PTC technology since 1970, soon after a collision in Darien, Connecticut killed four people. Following the 2008 Chatsworth, California crash that killed 25 people, Congress mandated that railroads implement the technology, which prevents trains from colliding and speeding. For years, however, the implementation of the technology has been delayed. Since NTSB first recommended PTC, more than 300 people have died, thousands have been injured, and millions of dollars in property damages have been incurred.

The PTC deadline is now almost one year away – December 31, 2018. It is imperative that railroads complete implementation before the deadline. They must clearly understand that the consequences of failure will be stringent and prompt. Please provide information on the following questions:

1. Based on the reports and information provided to you by railroads, and your knowledge of efforts necessary to complete PTC implementation, what railroads do you anticipate will have fully implemented PTC by the end of 2018?
2. What railroads do you anticipate will fail to implement PTC by 2018?
3. What is your plan to impose fines and penalties for railroads that fail to comply with the law?
4. Can you confirm that you will be vigorous in enforcing the deadline, imposing strong fines and penalties, where necessary, on railroads that fail to meet the deadline?
5. How are you communicating your enforcement plans to the industry?
6. What steps are you taking to implement other provisions of law and safety requirements, such as requirements from the 2015 surface transportation bill, known as the FAST Act, that passenger and commuter railroads complete a speed-limit action plan (section 11406) to prevent over-speed accidents into curves and commuter railroads improve inspection practices (section 11409)?

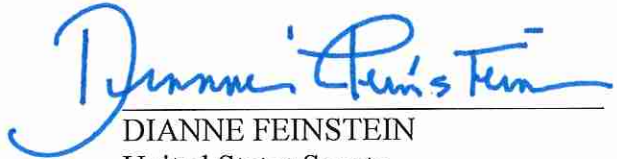
7. What level of funding will be included in the President's yet-to-be-released infrastructure proposal to expedite PTC implementation and advance other rail safety efforts?
8. What steps is DOT taking to approve and expedite the use of federal funds and grants by recipients for the implementation of PTC?

We appreciate your attention to this matter and urgent efforts to ensure railroads implement lifesaving PTC technology.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senate



BILL NELSON
United States Senate



CHARLES E. SCHUMER
United States Senate



ROBERT P. CASEY, JR.
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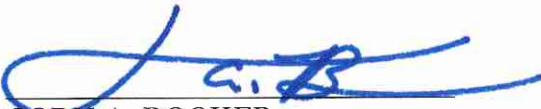
CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
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ROBERT MENENDEZ
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KAMALA D. HARRIS
United States Senate



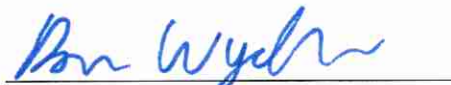
CORY A. BOOKER
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