

ENTERED
Office of Proceedings
April 22, 2022
Part of
Public Record

John Walker
Maryland State Legislative Board Secretary
SMART-TD
10330 Mockingbird Pond Ct
Burke, VA 22015
(703) 987-0757
EMAIL JRWalker610@gmail.com

Re: STB Testimony

Surface Transportation Board
Docket Number EP 770
395 E St SW, Washington, DC 20423
EMAIL: rcpa@stb.gov

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Surface Transportation Board Washington DC,

My name is John Walker, local 610 SMART Transportation Division Baltimore, Maryland CSX Benning Yard Washington DC. I am a seventeen year plus railroad conductor in freight and passenger service here in the greater Washington DC area. My friends call me Johnny, and that makes my ears perk up every time I arrive at the terminal.

Over the last seventeen years, I have taken hundreds of passengers thousands of miles. I have closed down two circus trains here in DC and had the honor of spotting The Celebrate America Train with our "Support the Troops and First Responders" locomotives and the armor from the 3rd Infantry Division from Fort Stewart, Georgia. To say I have had an eventful career on the railroad would be an understatement. I love this job.

The last three years of this dream job have become a nightmare. Using all the proper channels through CSX, I cannot stop the unsafe chaos currently going on. Customers are not actually being serviced, but we are instructed to show their freight cars moved or fear reprisals from our management. I have seen several Automatic Equipment Identification (AEI) screenshots contradicting the work orders issued to trains. These screenshots have huge blocks of cars missing showing (AEI not found). The cars never left the terminal to be scanned; however, the work order shows they departed, resting the car's movement clock.

I felt I had to protect the work, so I followed my supervisor's instructions for months, thinking this would only be temporary. Finally, after several customer complaints, I had to be their advocate, following one of CSX's Core values, "Right Results Right Way." Even though I was placed in the middle of some challenging conversations, I stood firm against these fraudulent actives that I was ordered to maintain with nothing ever put in writing, even upon request. Eventually, after months of harassment, they were able to place me in a discipline status that eventually had me fired for a year and six months. An arbitration brought me back with exoneration and a reversal of heavy discipline for a minor infraction.

It was difficult for my family and me, but I bettered myself through education and a new career, still wanting to go back to the life I lived and the job I loved. I am a Railroader through and through, and no one will ever be able to take that away from me, but I had to go back.

I had to return to protect our membership and the customers I have dedicated myself to serving because CSX was certainly not doing this. It was weird and shameful at first, but I kept moving forward even with the harassment that was still evident. The weirdness and shame slowly faded, but the harassment increased, and our membership numbers decreased through injury, discipline, new careers, or just not showing up due to stress. I never thought this would happen to me, but there will never be a tomb deep enough to put a railroader's feelings and stresses down for good. On Easter eve, less than four miles from these hearings under Pennsylvania Avenue, I witnessed my third body at Benning Yard. You tell yourself that you get used to it, but you never do. I had to go through it twice, once on the rear of a train car and then by foot because they were not letting vehicle traffic go through. I told everyone possible that day. I told the dispatcher I told my engineer, and I called the employee assistance program as soon as I got off work. The only thing that I was able to do was to mark myself off sick, risking points and discipline because this was not a covered incident.

I slept through Easter trying to put it away. Then, looking at the computer for the next day's lineup, I saw that I might have been able to have another day or at least a few more hours. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to me, my other Conductor on our extra board was not put off in an injured status from an injury that happened at work that Saturday. So, Monday morning, I received a late call where I informed the crew caller of everything that went on this weekend, stating, "if CSX wants me to work, I guess that's what I have to do."

Going to work that day was hard enough, and everything kept compounding. Every possible job that needed to be done was given to me as if it was a life-threatening situation. I had a plan, and I headed out. While getting ready to make my next double, it all just came crashing down, and I needed to go. I radioed the Yardmaster explaining the situation and how I just need to go home and get help; it was unsafe for me to continue with my work. I did not abandon my post, and I tied my train down as always required with the proper brake test. Once that was done, I cut my locomotive away and sent my engineer back to the office because I just had to walk back.

I faxed my paperwork to the Yardmaster and left the yard calling our employee assistance program to explain my situation and try to get the help I needed. The only thing that I received was "we cannot mark you off" (mark off is railroad slang for taking time off). All the required assistance that my railroad is legally and contractually required to give was given in lip service and excuses. I had to seek outside care with my own insurance plan.

The only call that I received to check on my well-being was at 5:00 AM the following day because my time ticket was still open. Again, I explained the entire situation to the same crew caller the following day. Who then explained that this call was a courtesy because of a new policy requiring an email to the Assistant Superintendent for any open tickets. She then asked if I was supposed to be marked off critical incident? Where I replied that it was my off day now, and I guess CSX thinks I'm fine, so I'll be ready for work at 22:00h.

The next day I was called into to work a coal train, and while we were putting it away, our dispatcher informed us that we needed to call our trainmaster. This is not an uncommon occurrence to get further instructions; however, this call was not for the crew; it was for me. I do not carry my phone at work, and I immediately retrieved it when we got back to the terminal. I then noticed text messages from our Yardmaster, who knew we were on the train at that time, informing me of the need to call our trainmaster before we left work.

When I called our trainmaster, he wanted to know what happened that day and I explained the entire situation from Saturday evening till my leaving on Monday. At that point, he informed me that our Assistant Superintendent wanted to charge me with a major rule's violation. This, along with my incident, is currently hanging over my head while I am still able to work because I am the only person available to work at my understaffed terminal. In addition, I was told that I did not mark off properly and inform a trainmaster of my mental health situation.

It is hard for a former US Navy Corpsman to admit and seek help, and the same goes for a railroader. I did not want anyone to know because I thought it was a weakness and nothing is confidential with our management. The last time I tried to seek medical treatment for my mother at work. The same manager told me, "Once you are here, you're here for up to 12 hours until we release you." I could not go to the inquest that day to make sure that my mother remained committed to getting the help that she needed. This is an all-too-common occurrence at CSX, where I have over twelve years of service.

Once you are in a discipline program, you can never get rid of it. I have been placed in an attendance program for over six years for one missed call. I have over 2193 days since my last injury incident for a wasp sting that I reported as required by CSX rules. None of these incidents will ever go away from your record until you are removed from employment at CSX.

Even with this heavy burden that CSX has intensified with the probable future dismissal. I still carry on and go to work because I am no longer scared. I am no longer scared of what CSX can do because I will always be a railroader, and they will never be able to take that away from me. I stand by my statements in this letter to the board, and I thank you for your time. CSX may place me under their thumb and require me to live by their rules, but their rules do not govern me. I am governed by God's rules and our contract, both of which CSX chooses to ignore in **its** best interest. No matter what happens, I am grateful to provide testimony for this board because the truth needs to be told, and I am no longer scared to tell it.

Sincerely,

John Walker