

March 23, 2022

Subject: HF2295 – Bernardy: Work Zone Safety Pilot Program

Chair Hornstein and Members of the House Transportation Committee.

Dear Chair Hornstein and Members of the House Transportation Committee,

My name is Kellen Schmidt. I am an Electrical Lineman for a Utility Company here in Minnesota. A few years ago, I was behind the amendment to the “Ted Foss Move Over Law” that your committee favored by adding the language of “Slowing Down and Moving Over for Utility Workers on ALL Roadways.” I appreciate your support and would like to further discuss your Support to HF 2294 DE2 amendment Work Zone Safety.

As you are aware, in 2021 Traffic Deaths were the highest since 2007. Nearly 500 people died on Minnesota Roadways. We can sit all day and come up with different theories, and ideas to why that is but the fact of the matter is that the nearly 500 people never made it home to their loved ones. I was invited to join the Minnesota Department of Public Safety’s Press Conference alongside Colonel Matt Langer on October 18, 2021 to discuss the traffic deaths.

I know firsthand the dangers of careless and distracted driving. I have had my hard hat blown off my head numerous times by passing vehicles from the burst of winds because they didn’t move over to the next lane or slow down. My road cones have been knocked over by drivers who were distracted and didn’t even know they hit the cone, dragging it hundreds of yards down the road under their vehicle until it finally would come loose.

During the middle of the night in a rural town west of the Metro my crew and I had all the proper signage and flashing lights assembled trying to restore power. Unfortunately, we got a truck stuck and had to pull it out with another vehicle that was up on the asphalt. The crew saw a car coming towards them and were trying to get the drivers attention by the shining of flashlights, waving the lighted stop sign at the vehicle, waving, shouting but the driver was not paying attention. As I was in the truck that was stuck in the ditch, I saw it all happen and couldn’t do a thing about it. The vehicle was cruising at the speed limit (55mph) and as it approached, I could see the driver was watching a video with his phone on the bottom portion of the steering wheel. The car came to a fast and complete stop, the driver looked up and was frustrated we were in his way. We realized he had a car with some self-driving functionality which stopped his vehicle before it hit and injured 4 of my coworkers. He said some words to us and drove away.

In another incident a coworker of mine was alongside his utility truck and struck by a driver and seriously injured. The driver who hit my coworker hit him so hard he flipped into the air. Again, the crew watched it happen but couldn’t react fast enough. The driver did a hit and run and was found after the fact. The utility worker eventually returned to work after many substantial injuries.

The safety of our roadside workers should be priority. In most cases they are essential to our everyday life. As I stated in previous Committees, electricity was the number one hazard in my occupation, today its now traffic. We can put all the control measures in place to make a safe work zone, but we can not control the drivers on the roadways. Some say maybe you should include more road cones in your traffic

control. Road cones don't save bones, as stated before they get driven over. Roadside workers seem to be camouflaged to everyday drivers and are not being seen!

On March 19<sup>th</sup> 2021 I was sitting at a stoplight in my utility company pickup and was struck by a semi. That quick second may have changed my life forever. It's been a little over a year and I am still not back to work. I am struggling with a Traumatic Brain Injury with lack of strength on my right side. This letter isn't about me, its about preventing other roadside workers from dealing with struggles I have had over the past year. Roadsides are our office, we need people to Slow Down, Move Over, don't drive distracted, don't drive impaired, drive... just drive! Driving is a privilege not a right.

Today I am asking you to support HF 2294 DE2 amendment: Work Zone Safety. These Essential Workers are asking for your help to keep them safe and get them home.

Your friend in safety,

Kellen Schmidt