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June 23, 1971

Dear Mr. President,

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In 1960 my Dad had the distinct pleasure of being your Conductor on you Campaign Train from Champaign, Illinois to Centralia, Illinois, via the Illinois Central Railroad. It was a very proud moment in his life. He was introduced to you, and shook your hand. It was a story that he often told us.

Dad was also the Conductor on the train that crashed at Tonti, Illinois on June 10, 1971. He was killed along with ten passengers.

Dad was concerned about the safety of his passengers and his crew, in fact he has written letters to Secretary of Transportation, Mr. John Volpe reporting unsafe working conditions. About two years ago Mr. Volpe sent a representative to Champaign and the dangerous, but common practice of sending a train out without adequate air-pressure for braking power was discontinued, as a result. But that was merely a drop in the proverbial bucket. Ask any Railroader, they are all afraid. Afraid because of the dangerous condition of their equipment, and afraid to speak out for fear of losing their jobs.

Railbeds are desperately neglected, on some sections of track trains must slow to 5 MPH to prevent derailment. Passenger trains require four Diesel engines for adequate pulling power, freight trains often need six or seven - due to the lack of repair.

Mr. President, if you wonder why I am writing you about this, it is because I don't know what else to do. Railroading is a tradition in my family. My Grandfather retired as a Conductor for the ICRR and my younger brother (ex-Marine and Viet-Nam Veteran) is now a brakeman for the ICRR. My youngest brother (presently in the Marines) has high hopes of returning to work for the railroad. I fear for their lives. Because another disaster is inevitable if safety precautions are not taken at once.

The Railroads need an investigatory agency as vigilant as the Federal Aviation Agency - not just for passenger service, but for freight service, too. They need increased manpower to repair the deteriorating railbeds and equipment. Perhaps the Federal investigation of the Tonti Disaster will reveal the dangerous state that the railroads are in. AmTrak is a definite step in the right direction, but too little, too late for my Dad.

Sincerely,

Carol E. Ell

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