

STATEMENT OF JENNIFER L. HOMENDY
NOMINEE, MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE, AND TRANSPORTATION
UNITED STATES SENATE
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Thank you, Chairman Thune, Ranking Member Nelson, and Members of the Committee. I am honored to appear before you today as you consider my nomination to be a Member of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB or Board). I am extremely grateful to Senator Schumer for recommending me, President Trump for nominating me, and Ranking Members DeFazio and Capuano for their support and, most importantly, for their faith in me and my work over the past 14 years on the Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I Committee). It has truly been an honor to work for what I believe is the greatest legislative body in the world.

I would like to thank Senator Blumenthal from my home State of Connecticut for his unwavering commitment to safety. Although Virginia is now my home, Connecticut will always be where my heart lives. I would also like to thank NTSB Member Dinh-Zarr, Member Weener, and NTSB staff for joining me today, and your staff – in particular, Devon Barnhart, Patrick Fuchs, Adrian Arnakis, and Fern Gibbons – who have been tremendous partners over the years in our pursuit to improve transportation safety.

Before I begin, I would like to introduce some of my family and friends. My husband, Mike, is my best friend, my biggest cheerleader, and the most amazing father to our 10-year old daughter, Alexandra (Lexi). Lexi may very well appear before you one day as a nominee for the National Aeronautics and Space Administration given her excellent grades in math and science and obsession with *Star Wars* and the National Air and Space Museum.

Also joining me today are my parents, Sante and Nancy Esposito, my brother, Bryan, my sister-in-law, Danielle, and my close friends, Cathey Capozziello and her two children, Sarah Belle and Mary Danz, Karen Hart and her two children, Ava and Roman, and Debbie Stokes. My brother, Mike, and my sister, Erin, and their families and my in-laws, Edward and Cathy Homendy, are viewing today's hearing from their homes.

There are a few things I would like for you to know about me as you consider my nomination.

First, I believe strongly in public service. My father spent his entire career as a public servant for the Legislative Commissioners' Office of the Connecticut General Assembly, the Congressional Budget Office, the House Committee on Budget, and the T&I Committee, where he retired in 1998. He and my mother worked hard to instill in us from a very early age the importance of serving others to serve God and a strong conviction that the actions of just one person can make a tremendous difference in the world.

I believe those values are reflected in my work as Democratic Staff Director of the Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines, and Hazardous Materials of the T&I Committee, a position I have held since June 2004. If confirmed, I believe my extensive background in rail, pipeline, and hazardous materials safety will provide modal balance to the Board. Of the NTSB's 40 ongoing major

accident investigations, 13 involve freight or passenger railroads, including the February 4, 2018, collision of an Amtrak train and CSX freight train in Cayce, South Carolina, and the December 18, 2017, Amtrak derailment near DuPont, Washington. Four additional ongoing accident investigations involve natural gas pipelines, including the August 2, 2017, gas explosion at the Minnehaha Academy in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Second, I am passionate about safety. In 1998, the NTSB investigated a natural gas pipeline explosion and fire that destroyed a newly constructed home in South Riding, Virginia. A family of four was spending their first night in their new home. Around midnight, natural gas from a hole in the service line to the house entered the basement where it was ignited by the pilot light on the water heater, killing the mother and severely injuring the father.

The NTSB determined that had an excess flow valve been placed on the line, the explosion never would have occurred. The NTSB had been recommending the installation of excess flow valves for nearly 30 years.

In 2006, Congress took action and implemented that recommendation in the Pipeline Inspection, Protection, Enforcement, and Safety Act (PIPES Act) (P.L. 109-468) by requiring natural gas pipeline operators to install excess flow valves on all new or replaced single family residential service lines. Congress extended that requirement to multi-family residences and small commercial facilities in the Pipeline Safety, Regulatory Certainty, and Job Creation Act of 2011 (P.L. 112-90). I am proud to have been one of the lead negotiators on both of those laws.

Following enactment of the PIPES Act, the NTSB staff presented me with an excess flow valve that remains on my desk as a daily reminder of the importance of what we do on Capitol Hill – and what the hardworking men and women at the NTSB do – on a daily basis for our great Nation.

The NTSB saves lives. The Board's work informs decision-making by regulators and Congress. It helps industries identify deficiencies and make vital safety improvements, and provides hope to grieving families that something positive will come from their tragic loss.

Over the past 14 years, I have listened closely to families as they recount the tragedies they have experienced. I understand their need for answers and their strong desire to find solutions to prevent future accidents and loss of life.

I listened to the Connollys, the Millers, and the residents of Baker Estates, a mobile home park in Battle Creek, Michigan, who welcomed me into their homes and businesses in 2010 when the T&I Committee investigated a major oil pipeline rupture that was not discovered or addressed for 17 hours.

I listened to the Moores, who testified before the T&I Committee about improving safety at grade crossings. Their 16-year-old son, Ryan, and two others died in a grade crossing accident in Northeastern Ohio in 1995. It was a passive crossing with no active warning devices, much like the crossing in North Carolina where my father's cousin was killed in 1982.

I listened to the Seelings, who visited Chairman Oberstar and me following the death of their son, Chris, in 2005. Chris was a locomotive engineer who was killed when his freight train was diverted from the main line to an industry track where it struck an unoccupied, parked train, similar to the circumstances surrounding the Cayce, South Carolina, accident this past February.

Three tank cars on Chris' train contained chlorine, and one of them breached. The entire area was overwhelmed with chlorine gas. As a result, nine people died of chlorine gas inhalation: Chris, six workers at the Avondale Mills textile plant, which was adjacent to the track, a truck driver who was at one of the plant facilities, and a nearby resident. More than 550 people were taken to hospitals, 75 of whom were admitted for treatment, and about 5,400 others were evacuated for several days.

The cause of the accident was a misaligned switch and the NTSB determined that Positive Train Control (PTC) would have prevented it.

Throughout the past 14 years, I have watched Members of Congress spend countless hours meeting with families struck by tragic accidents and moving legislation that makes significant strides in safety, often closing longstanding NTSB recommendations that were issued in response to these and other tragedies. Thank you so much for allowing me to be part of that.

In closing, I would like to take a moment to address the people who made that possible. To the NTSB Members and staff: Thank you for your expertise, for your steadfast commitment to safety, and for your advocacy and guidance over the years. Without you, the voices of these families and many others may never have been heard.

If confirmed, I would consider it a great honor and privilege to serve my country at the Board and work with this Committee to improve safety across all of the modes of transportation.

Thank you again for this opportunity, and I look forward to answering your questions.