

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 19, 2018

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Chairwoman  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Transportation, Housing and Urban  
Development, and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Ranking Member  
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on  
Transportation, Housing and Urban  
Development, and Related Agencies  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Chairwoman Collins and Ranking Member Reed,

We write to respectfully request at least level funding for the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations bill. A series of tragic rail accidents in our region have highlighted NTSB's critical role in transportation safety, but without critical resources, the NTSB's mission could be significantly impaired. As you know, NTSB is mandated by Congress to address every civil aviation accident in the country, as well as significant railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline accidents. We cannot allow the Board's vital safety mission to be undermined by budgets that reduce its ability to respond to accidents, regardless of where they occur. NTSB's work in our region is helping to save lives, and we are committed to aiding that work in whatever manner we are able.

The Northeast rail corridor—the most heavily trafficked railway in the country—and other passenger rail systems in the Northeast have suffered a number of accidents in recent years. May 2015 saw the most tragic and high-profile Amtrak accident in a generation, when a Northeast Regional train derailed in Philadelphia, killing eight passengers and injuring over two hundred others. In response, NTSB launched staff to support on-scene activities and download locomotive event recorders. NTSB engineers also processed forward-facing video and recovered surveillance video, portable electronic devices, and phone records from the wreckage. Other current open NTSB investigations include two separate collisions involving Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) trains, both occurring in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, in February and August of 2017, the May 2017 derailment of a Metro-North train in Rye, New York, among several others.

Throughout these major incidents and successive safety breaches at Amtrak and Metro-North, NTSB has been methodical, responsive, and capable in their investigations. They have shared important, life-saving recommendations with Metro-North, FRA, Amtrak, and state regulators to help avert future tragedies, all while responding to new incidents throughout the country and across all modes of transportation.

However, it is clear that NTSB's resources are being strained under the weight of so many ongoing investigations. NTSB has only twelve railroad investigators, and three are now eligible for retirement. Those twelve investigators are currently working on eighteen open rail investigations that include a special investigation report on SEPTA and an investigative hearing on Amtrak. Further, NTSB currently only has three hazardous materials investigators who

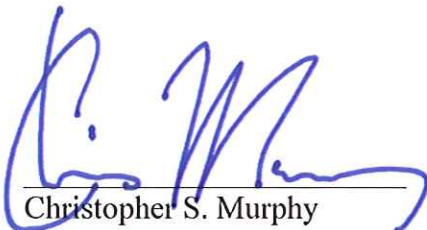
support investigations for all modes, and they are currently working on fifteen open investigations. While we have continually urged NTSB to complete its investigations as quickly as possible, the ability of the Board to speedily conclude such reviews is limited by its relatively small investigatory staff and the fact that it is simultaneously examining sixteen railroad and rail transit accidents at the present time.

As the Board's FY 2015 budget request noted in a previous year, "although our budget is small, adequate funding is essential to fulfill our mission to advance and support the transportation safety of the American Public." The Board's FY2015 request also noted, "The NTSB has little flexibility to absorb even small [cost] increases without affecting staffing levels because salaries, benefits, and fixed costs such as rent, shared services, and security constitute the majority of our budget."


We request that you fund the National Transportation Safety Board at least at \$110.4 million for FY2019, a level consistent with the FY2018 enacted level and a level \$2.4 million above the President's Budget Request for FY2019. This level will allow the agency to fund seven critical investigative hires. Finally, our request will allow the agency to continue its initiatives to stabilize its workforce and improve investigative capabilities involving emerging transportation technologies, including in rail.

We appreciate your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



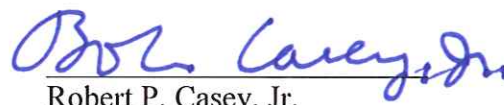
Christopher S. Murphy  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



Robert P. Casey, Jr.  
United States Senator