



Romaine Robert Quinn

STATE SENATOR • 25TH SENATE DISTRICT

From: Senator Romaine Robert Quinn
To: Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government
Re: **Testimony on SB 109**
Relating to: operation of an all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle owned by an electric cooperative on a highway
Date: September 27, 2023

Thank you, members of the Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government for hearing Senate Bill 109 today.

Current law allows public utilities the ability to operate ATVs/UTVs on public roadways for the purposes of line maintenance, construction, or restoration of power. Electric cooperatives currently do not fit under the definition of “public utility” in this statute.

Senate Bill 109 includes electric cooperatives in the existing exemption for utilities. Senate Amendment 1 further includes maintenance work that is contracted by a municipality or electric cooperative.

Utilities need to conduct power line maintenance and restoration – especially after storms and major power outages. ATVs and UTVs have become an essential tool in accessing power line rights of way in areas of snow, wet ground conditions, fallen trees, and other rough terrain.

Public utilities are already allowed to use ATVs/UTVs for this important work. Please include electric cooperatives as part of the existing definition of a utility for this purpose so that they too can better serve their customers.

Thank you for your time and consideration today. I ask for your support in passing Senate Bill 109.

September 27th, 2023

Testimony on Senate Bill 109

Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government

Thank you, Chairman Tomczyk and other Senate committee members, for having a hearing today on Senate Bill 109 relating to the operation of an all-terrain vehicle or utility terrain vehicle owned by an electric cooperative on a highway.

Northern Wisconsin experienced record-breaking snowfall, and what came of that was its citizens not having any power. Winter storms were prevalent all over, which caused damage caused by falling trees on power lines, making it difficult for electric restoration crews to traverse many areas.

An ATV or UTV has become essential for utilities to conduct power line maintenance, construction, and restoration of power. These vehicles have the ability to traverse rough terrain with low environmental impact and can carry tools, equipment, and workers into areas not accessible by truck. Linemen regularly need to drive ATVs or UTVs on public roads and occasionally along freeways to access their power line rights of way.

As the law currently stands, electric cooperatives do not fit under the definition of "public utility". This bill would allow this exemption to take place and allow electric cooperatives to operate ATVs and UTVs on public roadways for the purposes of line maintenance, construction, or restoration of power.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work on this bill with my colleague from the Senate, Senator Quinn. Thank you for your time today, and thank you for your consideration of this bill.



Senate Committee on Transportation and Local Government

2023 Senate Bill 109

Operation of an All-Terrain Vehicle or Utility Terrain Vehicle Owned by an Electric Cooperative on a Highway.

September 27, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Tomczyk, and members of the Committee. I am Lt. Jacob Holsclaw, and I serve as the Off-highway Vehicle Administrator for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Thank you for the opportunity to testify, for informational purposes, on Senate Bill 109, related to the operation of an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) or utility terrain vehicle (UTV) owned by an electric cooperative on a highway.

Under current law ATVs and UTVs are prohibited from operation on a freeway system unless the Wisconsin Department of Transportation authorizes their use. Operation on a highway is also generally prohibited with some exemptions being present. ATVs and UTVs owned by a municipality, state agency, public utility, or the Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission are allowed to operate on the highway system when engaged in an emergency or direct function of that entity subject to certain safety constraints.

Senate Bill 109 adds language to include electric cooperatives as a legal highway operation exemption. Passage of this bill could potentially provide more ATV or UTV interaction with the public and highway users. Electric cooperatives currently use trucks and other machinery to implement routine and emergency maintenance of the electrical grid. The department does not anticipate this change would produce safety concerns if ATV/UTV operation is done in compliance with other safety rules currently covered in state statute.

On behalf of the Department of Natural Resources, we would like to thank you for your time today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.