



# The Eagle-Tribune

North Andover, Massachusetts

## Gas safety bill in memory of Leonel Rondon expected to pass

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BOSTON — A proposal to require monitors to supervise work on natural gas pipes is expected to be approved by Congress as part of a year-end government spending bill.

The measure named after Leonel Rondon, the Lawrence teenager killed in the Sept. 13, 2018, Merrimack Valley gas disaster, calls for other safety measures such as the installation of pressure monitoring devices so that utility employees can quickly shut off gas flow in an emergency.

The bill's main sponsor, Sen. Ed Markey, D-Malden, called its expected passage a "tribute" to Rondon and a "small justice for the Merrimack Valley community."

"The natural gas explosions that struck Lawrence, Andover and North Andover more than two years ago were yet another example of corporations cutting corners to turn a profit," Markey said in a statement. "The passage of this legislation is a critical step in ensuring that we prioritize public safety over corporate profit and never allow a tragic disaster like this to happen again."

Reps. Lori Trahan, D-Westford, and Seth Moulton, D-Salem, filed the bill in the House of Representatives, which was also poised to approve the measure.

"For too long, outdated and insufficient safety regulations have failed the communities they were supposed to protect," Trahan said in a statement. "Today's passage of the Leonel Rondon Pipeline Safety Act will apply the many lessons taken from this tragedy — including those informed by NTSB's experts — to ensure that no community ever has to experience this type of terrible devastation again."

Increased monitoring of gas work was one recommendation by the National Transportation Safety

Board in the aftermath of the disaster. Investigators found that the disaster was preceded by years of glaring mistakes by Columbia Gas of Massachusetts, including shoddy record keeping.

A swell of over-pressurized gas through underground lines fueled fires and explosions that destroyed five homes, damaged 131 properties, injured three firefighters and 19 civilians, and forced the evacuations of 50,000 people.

The total cost of the disaster to Columbia Gas, its parent company and insurers was estimated at more than \$1.6 billion.

Christian M. Wade covers the Massachusetts Statehouse for North of Boston Media Group's newspapers and websites.