



Town of Fairfield

Office of the First Selectwoman

Brenda Kupchick
First Selectwoman
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August 26, 2020

RE: Testimony for the August 27th Informational Forum

To: Senator Needleman, Senator Lesser, Senator Formica, Representative Arconti, Representative Allie-Brennan, Representative Ferraro and distinguished members of the Energy & Technology Committee

I am writing on behalf of the Town of Fairfield, CT and our Emergency Management Team in response to our experience with United Illuminating after Tropical Storm Isaias.

The Town of Fairfield has been a vocal critic of the UI response to major weather events and resulting power outages and road closures. These weather events harm our citizens economically and jeopardize their safety. Since Superstorm Sandy, the Town has pressed UI, DEMHS and PURA for changes to the Make Safe Protocols. Despite these urgent pleas, the Make Safe Protocol remains unchanged.

Tropical Storm Isaias has once again demonstrated the fragility of our electrical distribution system and the inadequacy of the recovery and restoration resources.

Sandy and Isaias were not Hurricanes but both crippled our community and state. We cannot accept anything less than a complete revision of the utilities storm response and service restoration playbook.

In order to secure our physical as well as economic safety the following areas need strong leadership and aggressive upgrades:

Communications

Town Officials and individual residents need improved communication from UI, phone and cable services. Those communications must include real time assessments of damage and restoration timetables. The hours of fruitless attempts by Town Officials and residents to obtain a fundamental understanding of the restoration efforts and timelines generates the majority of the anger and frustration. Real time and actionable information will allow impacted stakeholders to plan effectively for the emergency and recovery.

Without this information, we are planning in a vacuum. Fully informed, locally deployed liaisons are a critical ingredient in this communication. The liaisons must share real time data on what services are being performed by utility crews and where. The size, scope and distribution of those crews in each community are essential to the customer/town/utility partnership. In many cases, residents finally received communication from UI 48 hours after their power was restored. With today's technology, this should be easily avoided in the future.

Road Openings

Fairfield was very pleased with the adjustments UI made to the Make Safe Protocol in collaborating with the Town to reopen closed roads. This partnership respected the Department of Public Work's understanding of local conditions and empowered crews to make priority decisions based on that information. Clearly, the limits on resources hampers our reopening efforts, and in the case of Isaias, it took five days to fully open local streets. This is a dangerously long period of time for those residents who are isolated by downed trees and wires.

Restoration

With storms becoming more frequent and increasingly violent, it is readily apparent that we cannot fight tomorrow's challenges with yesterday's playbook. Structural changes in resource acquisition and deployment are today's challenge. While no utility can maintain a standing workforce for catastrophic events, they must modify the restoration plans to increase and speed the deployment and the utilization of private sector and partner utility resources. In Isaias, the arrival of those resources were not fully realized until the Friday following the Tuesday afternoon storm which was simply too long.

The safety and economic impact of these long days and nights without power justify mandated policies for timely and robust response.

Cable and Internet Providers:

While our state and nation live under a pandemic, internet reliability is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity for many residents to perform their work responsibilities to make a living. We have to do everything we can to get residents who work from home, and students who are being educated from home, restored as quickly as possible.

From my experience as a town leader who received hundreds of complaints and as a customer, I implore PURA to review and make changes to the current policies regulating internet providers regarding accountability.

Respectfully submitted,



Brenda L. Kupchick
First Selectwoman