



August 27, 2020

## **Testimony to CGA Energy and Technology Committee Forum on Eversource Response to Tropical Storm Isaias**

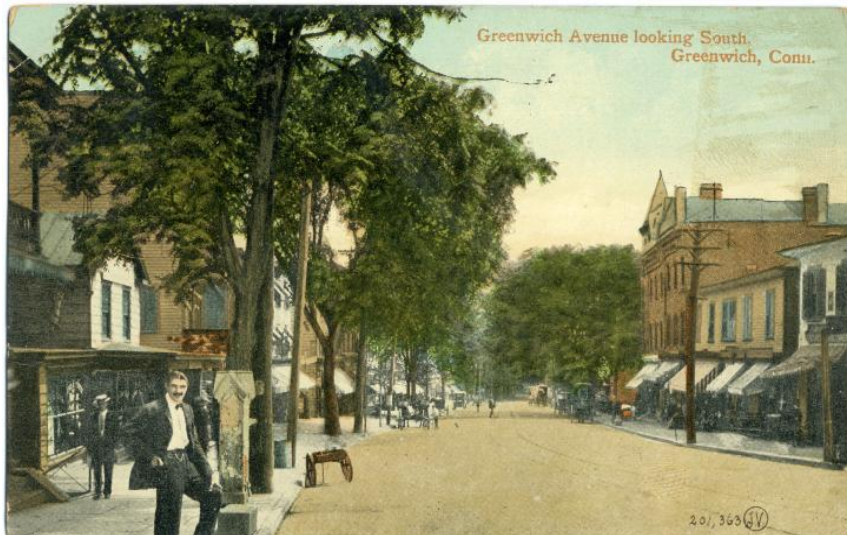
Dear Chairmen Needleman and Arconti and Energy and Technology Committee Members:

The Greenwich Tree Conservancy, an 800 strong non-profit organization, has worked with and watched Eversource for over a decade. We continue to be alarmed at their ineffective performance. If the past serves as a predictor of the future, then Connecticut, a coastal state already impacted by climate change needs to implement immediate changes to our energy sourcing and management. There is no reason why trees and infrastructure cannot coexist. Mature, healthy trees are the backbone of our ecosystem and are essential to mitigate the severe weather which will recur due to climate change. We must balance the needs of the utilities with the measurable benefits provided by trees to our communities. We urge our State officials and PURA as the regulating authority to look beyond Eversource's "act of nature" response, to the broader elements of the quality of their systems and response, the recognition of new weather patterns, and the current financial structure under which Eversource operates.

In 2012, PURA slammed Connecticut Light & Power in a decision analyzing the utility company's response to two storms, calling it "deficient and inadequate."  
(<https://patch.com/connecticut/wilton/pura-wants-to-penalize-clp-for-deficient-response-to-a0b81b9fa4>) Despite the passage of 8 years, the successor's response remains inadequate and deficient. They did not have a well-crafted restoration plan and the crews they did have were not allocated in an efficient manner. Many towns did not see crews for many days.

We ask that you evaluate the following:

How does their current above ground pole distribution system compare to that designed a



century ago? One need only look at images of Greenwich from the early 1900s to see the lack of progress.

- How has Eversource strengthened the pole distribution system to withstand storms while accommodating the weight of cable, transformers, coils of wire, internet and phone?
- How much has it cost the state, municipalities, and residents to deal with the impacts of this storm? In looking back 20 years, how much has it cost directly (with tree trimming and storm clean-up) and indirectly when considering losses to businesses and individuals?
- Has the CGA and/or PURA looked at Eversource's Budget, P&L or Balance sheets to determine their expenditures for their "enhanced tree trimming" program plus how much they spend on cleanup, replacing damaged poles/ lines and power restoration, then compare those combined costs to what it would cost to install powerlines underground?

Eversource has raised rates yet has had the worst response to a storm in years.

- Why is Eversource granted a guaranteed rate of return rather than a return contingent upon performance?
- Why aren't incentives placed by PURA that will promote quicker responses and undergrounding of wires where appropriate? If poles are truly the only option, then how can they be replaced based upon 21<sup>st</sup> century demands of a system to ensure electricity and communications systems?
- Does the higher rate of return for transmission projects discourage investments in distribution projects?
- Does their financial structure and regulatory oversight need to be thoroughly evaluated to determine whether it promotes tree trimming and repeated storm recovery costs shouldered by ratepayers rather than resiliency investments which would better perform under severe weather conditions?
- How have municipal utility systems rates and storm responses compared to Eversource? What lessons can we learn from them?
- How does the statutory authority granted to, and oversight by, PURA promote consistency with Connecticut's long-term energy and resilience plans or detract from them? Are changes needed?

The Greenwich Tree Conservancy asks the Legislature for answers from Eversource to these questions. Tropical Storm Isaias caused significant damage to the power grid and downed trees were blamed. Eversource needs to stop blaming nature and put a plan in place for Connecticut, using 21<sup>st</sup> century solutions.

The Greenwich Tree Conservancy believes a different incentive program is necessary that rewards innovative technological solutions. Eversource has shown that they will not do what is cost effective and innovative unless it is mandated.

Respectfully submitted,

**JoAnn Messina, Executive Director**  
*Greenwich Tree Conservancy*  
 15 Perryridge Road  
 Greenwich, CT 06830  
**[www.greenwichtreeconservancy.org](http://www.greenwichtreeconservancy.org)**