

TESTIMONY CONCERNING TROPICAL STORM ISAIAS RESPONSE AND ELECTRIC UTILITY RATE INCREASES
August 27, 2020

To: Honored Chairs Sen. Needleman and Rep. Arconti and Distinguished Members of the Energy and Technology Committee

From: Susan Eastwood, Chair, Ashford Clean Energy Task Force

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony concerning Tropical Storm Isaias Response and Electric Utility Rate Increases. The Ashford Clean Energy Task Force (ACETF) is one of a statewide network of dedicated volunteer groups working with their municipal governments and town residents to support clean and efficient energy. Since 2009, the ACETF has worked to put solar PV on several town buildings and make lower cost solar available to town residents. We have also promoted Home Energy Solutions, energy audits and energy efficiency upgrades, and ductless heat pumps. We have run several bulb swaps to distribute LED bulbs and upgraded lighting in all town buildings. These innovations save money and help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions; however, many do depend on a reliable electrical grid. We have also worked closely with Eversource on benchmarking the town's energy use and other programs, when the Clean Energy Communities program was still in existence. We do appreciate the support that Eversource has given us in our work.

However, we must express our disappointment in the results of Eversource's efforts to 'harden the grid' after Super Storm Sandy and other major power outages of a few years ago. At that time, our towns in Eastern CT repeatedly suffered through weeks of no power. This is a rural area with beautiful forests lining most of our roads. We winced as we saw so many of our trees decimated by brutal trimming, but we believed that this was necessary to keep falling tree limbs off the power lines. Or so we were told. Storm Isaias showed the flaws in this plan. Ashford was one of the hardest hit and we were without power for a full week, again.

We would like to see the legislature pass policies that will support more renewable energy, including shared solar and aggregated community choice, and the infrastructure needed for storage and distribution of energy from solar and wind. Strong policies are needed to make the grid more resilient in the face of an increasingly unpredictable weather patterns and are essential to meeting Connecticut's climate goals. It is time to move away from fossil fuels and now is the time to stop any new fossil fuel development, including new natural gas plants like the Killingly Energy Center, and the expansion of pipelines needed to enable these.

We applaud the "Take Back the Grid" effort and urge you to take the opportunity to make meaningful change to support clean energy and energy efficiency in our state. It is key that our PUBLIC utilities are required to work towards our state's climate goals and for the benefit of the citizenry. Several bills that were being considered in the 2020 legislative session would help to do so. We support the following:

- Expand energy storage.
- Expand the Residential Solar Investment Program (RSIP)
- Keep solar net-metering until 2022

- Clarify the property tax exemption for solar and storage
- Repeal the Pipeline Tax.

These are a good start, but given the limited time we have remaining to meet the challenges of climate change, we urge you to take bold steps to truly ‘Take back the Grid’.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Susan Eastwood, Chair
Ashford Clean Energy Task Force
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