

To the members of the Energy and Technology Committee:

My name is Beth Heller and I am the First Selectman of the Town of Woodbridge. I am writing in regards to Draft LCO #3920 - [*An Act Concerning Emergency Response by Electric Distribution Companies and Revising the Regulation of Other Public Utilities.*](#)

In the aftermath of the **TUESDAY**, August 4, 2020 Tropical Storm Isaias, and another most recent storm on **THURSDAY**, August 27, 2020, I write to request your assistance on behalf of the people of Woodbridge to ensure that in the future we will not be made to suffer through the inadequate and unacceptable response we have just endured. As I write this letter today, August 29, 2020, we still have 10 residents without power from the 8/27/2020 storm, with a recent promise from United Illuminating, that the “estimated restoration time (ERT) for single customer outages is Monday (August 31st) at 11 p.m.” There were only close to 200 homes out in Woodbridge the entire time. How could it take four days to restore them? Because restoring a small number of homes, does not add to the total United Illuminating grid percentages.

I believe there is a pattern of “watching the numbers” so that UI works on areas first where they can increase the total number of restorations faster in larger areas, so that small Towns receive less assistance because our restoration cannot add to the numbers as fast as larger towns. We are a town of approximately 3724 homes. We are not a city of approximately 59,000 homes like New Haven, or a town with over 20,000 homes like Fairfield, Hamden and Milford – however, WE MUST COUNT AS WELL. We are discriminated against just because we are a small town! It becomes just a numbers game, and we are forced to compete with services to larger cities and towns. You see, servicing our Town, displays only small gains on the total outage grid of UI customers, so we wait longer and we are restored last! Shouldn’t “customer service” be the same to all customers?

My request to you as is twofold;

Empower our local First Responders

The lack of communication and coordination we experienced in Woodbridge, as I understand was also the case throughout the United Illuminating (UI) service area, and this must be addressed. I request that you obtain from UI a complete listing, hour by hour, of how many crews were deployed in Woodbridge and the exact (street address) location throughout the response effort. As First Selectman, I am outraged that I was unable to obtain this information in real time to assist our coordination efforts in Woodbridge or to communicate this to constituents who were rightly demanding updates as they struggled with the outrageous delay in restoring power.

Had we been able to receive key logistics and deployment information in real-time, our Emergency Operations Center could have supported efforts and provided important

guidance to help prioritize and streamline the efforts of the Make Safe crew to work in tandem with our First Responders (Fire, Police, EMT and Public Works crews).

We know our town best and although we have the excess capacity to assist -- we were simply blocked from doing this by the very poor communication and coordination efforts of UI. The frustration we felt in Woodbridge when we could not even receive the answer to the simplest questions (how many crews are working in town and where are they working, or where they had been working) for the duration of the response effort must be rectified. ***You must understand, that most of Woodbridge relies on well water, which means folks cannot flush toilets or have access to drinking water during a power outage.*** When our Police Chief, our Fire Chief, and I gave information to the liaisons as to where we thought we had the greatest need due to high concentration of elderly residents, we were told by UI that they cannot let us decide where the crews will go. One liaison implied that they cannot go to an area, just because I might have a friend living there. Outrageous! I have never, nor would I ever, ask for a “favor.” My concern was, is and will always be, ALL Woodbridge residents with emphasis on those with greatest need.

WE CANNOT ENDURE ANOTHER STORM WHERE WE ARE LEFT IN THE DARK BOTH LITERALLY AND OPERATIONALLY, WITH NO KNOWLEDGE OF THE RESTORATION EFFORT.

Please obtain the hour-by-hour location and manpower allocation data we were denied so we might properly analyze the adequacy of the response in Woodbridge. Without a full accounting of this storm we are destined to experience again these egregious mistakes because we will be unable to learn from these errors in time to correct them. This information is imperative to any effort here to improve our emergency response before the next storm hits.

Empower our consumers

Less urgently, but no less vital to our preparations for future storms, is the ability for individual electricity consumers -- the households of Woodbridge as well as those throughout our state -- to prepare their homes for future power outages, so we are less at the mercy of the potential failures of utility company efforts to restore power. Our residents were unable to get ANY information from UI at any point during these storms. Over the past 2 days, from Thursday 8/27 at 5 pm until Saturday 8/29 at approximately 7:30 pm I had no power at my home. I received 33 texts from UI, telling me that according to their records my home was “without power.” I was told “We are working to restore your service.” Finally, when a truck came to our area (our neighbor texted me at around 7:20 pm letting me know there was truck in the area) we were quickly restored. It took over 26 hours to send a truck to restore power to our area – they were not “working to restore” our service for over 26 hours, because it only took a short time for a truck to come to our street and hook us back up. Several times, texts also came saying that “Our records indicate that power has been restored” when it had not.

Over both these storms, folks were forced to turn to our first responders and to me for information of any kind. I was inundated with angry, frustrated, frightened residents' complaints, and I had no answers for them as well. Communication is the key to helping our townspeople. Facts, even if they are hard to hear, is how we take care of our people. It bears repeating that as First Selectman, I am outraged that I was unable to obtain information in real time to assist our coordination efforts in Woodbridge or to communicate to constituents who were rightly demanding updates as they struggled with the outrageous delay in restoring power.

Additionally, our cable service, Optimum/Altice was non-existent during and after the storm. Because they have a cable service monopoly in our Town, residents cannot choose to move to another service provider such as Comcast. Because folks "bundle" their cable television, internet and landline telephone, many of elderly residents do not have cell phones. Thus if cable service goes out, many of our elderly folks have no ability to dial 911 on their landline. There were many residents who did **not have cable or telephone service for ten** days after the August 4th storm!

I have many, but wish to give you one example of a customer who wrote to me on August 25th (14 days after the August 4th storm):

*Cable wires down from the house to the street - called **Cablevision**. Said they were coming to visit and then didn't. Had appointment last Thursday for 8 am. I called later that day and they told me they would come between 5 and 7 pm. When they realized it was a wire down issue (apparently that's a whole day appointment) they canceled and booked for me Monday at 8 am. On Monday, mid-day I called and they said we don't have you down -- your appointment was canceled. Then were told the appointment would be between 2 and 4pm that day. Then I called yesterday after 4pm and was told the appointment was suspended. I have a second entrance to house -- put up signs asking people to use other entrance. Fedex truck got stuck in wires.*

This is just one example of many, of Customer Service of Optimum/Altice. I will end my testimony with a recent message (August 20th) I received from a resident regarding United Illuminating:

In regard to the equipment on Richard Sweet, a UI official in our neighborhood Wednesday told us that the process for review of equipment utilizes a review of the records regarding the specific age of the lines and equipment, and that is followed by an engineer's analysis. While I appreciate the review by a customer services supervisor, it is unclear to me if a review of the record and engineer's analysis was done. Interestingly, a different UI worker was in our neighborhood a few days ago- we asked what the process is for upgrading equipment and lines if they are needed. He said that lines and equipment are repaired when they fail, not proactivity replaced.

Please advise if the customer service supervisor reviewed the records or service request from the UI foreman who requested we have UI do the review, if they reviewed the age of the specific equipment, if they did their own analysis of the wires and equipment, and if an engineer's assessment was done. Additionally, we were told last year that Woodbridge would have tree trimming around the power lines within 6 feet of the lines. A UI worker just told us that it is "too expensive" and will not be done. We would like to suggest that you clarify- on behalf of our town- what UI plans to do- or not do- regarding Woodbridge tree trimming. Perhaps part of our confusion is that we have had different UI workers/foreman giving us information- and some of it may have been well intentioned but misinformation. Your direct contact with UI leadership should allow expeditious and clear communication and clarity to the issues and plans of correction. Thank you so much for your efforts.

People in our town continually received little or no information during the storm, and after the storm, as you can see from the above story, a pattern of confusion and miscommunication from United Illuminating continues. I am able to produce many, many emails from our residents complaining about both Optimum and UI's customer service performance during and after storms. I can assure you that I will remain vigilant to how you, who serve us, respond to my suggestions. I will also do all in my power, even though I am a First Selectman of a "small" town, who must "count too", to **never let this happen again.**