

Testimony on LCO 3920

In the wake of severe weather, it has become apparent to lawmakers that relying on energy distribution corporations to put ratepayers first is not always possible or wise. I am glad to see LCO 3920 as a critical reevaluation of energy policy and what are state priorities and policy.

The way Connecticut generates, evaluates and distributes energy is in need of reform. Evaluation of resources has historically largely been dominated by the energy distribution private corporations in the form of the IRP. It has been slanted toward fossil fuels and grossly distorted and underestimated the effectiveness and environmental necessity of making the transition to renewable energy. The IRP should not be just a technical evaluation but be policy-driven with independent and more diverse stakeholder participation. We members of Fight the Hike pointed this out to the legislature over 12 years ago. ISO New England has similar problems. Their objectivity and links to corporations and the regional market need to be analyzed. They ignore environmental concerns and seem driven by hedge funds and other stockholders to push for investments of more natural gas and oil. Their practices ignored major changes in the market that have placed Connecticut up against a wall. Relying on the generation from gas turbines is no longer a viable option - gas prices have plummeted and Dominion has used this excuse to bully the State into another lopsided contract. Nuclear power has never been as cheap as it claims, as communities are forced to bear huge decommissioning costs, especially the cost of endless storage of spent fuel rods and its enormous long-term health risks. Why did ISO not see any of this coming? Energy policy is being manipulated by the market and corporate agendas that leave Connecticut ratepayers with ever-higher bills and increased environmental damage.

The destruction caused by climate change, which will bring ever more severe weather outages, make it essential that we move towards smaller and more local energy grids that are less vulnerable, more use of underground cables and increase in renewables such as wind and especially solar which has the added value of lowering peak time energy costs. Local public generation and distribution also reduces the conflict of interest of private corporations whose primary loyalty is to its shareholders. I suggest an incremental break-up of large distribution companies to be replaced by the efficiency of local public power utilities. Just look at the price differences for consumers in those communities in Connecticut with public power. This can also be enhanced by Community Aggregation, microgrids and other local strategies.

Keeping solar net metering until 2022 is a critical transition strategy to strengthen the fragile solar industry and to allow expansion. This includes making it easier with new rule-making for consumers to get access to solar in communities that have limited access especially in low-income urban and rural communities allowing for community shared solar programs among other strategies like using public spaces (large parking lots and south facing highway borders) to provide new renewable local generation.

Our aging housing stock especially in urban areas relies on horribly polluting oil furnaces and on natural gas and in addition are plagued by complex efficiency issues. New rules should help

consumers transition away from fossil fuel heaters. Connecticut needs to reduce heavy urban pollution by creating all-electric renewable-based homes with maximum energy efficiency.

Energy distribution companies should be using real weather science to analyze patterns that identify the most vulnerable areas where damage statistically reoccurs frequently. These areas should be targeted for creation of underground cables to avoid the repeated costs of storm damage. These policies should also be enhanced with coordination between various utilities to minimize duplicative costs. When one utility needs to dig such opportunities if coordinated could become shared costs if it is possible to combine such digs with the additional laying of underground electric cables. Right now, we have Call Before You Dig regulations - why not have Consult Before You Dig regulations for utilities to combine efforts when possible and build such infrastructure with easy repair access in mind. If Connecticut gradually shifts to underground cables and more local storage and generation, millions of dollars could be saved in the long run instead of being hostage to repeated storm damage costs. As long as energy distribution companies can simply pass on costs, they have little incentive to improve their infrastructure.

Finally, if towns were allowed to generate and increase energy storage locally and provide power to local residents using public land it could become an important source of new revenue for cash-strapped communities and for the State as a whole. Imagine public parking lots and properties becoming solar farms that provide energy and locations for EV charging stations to make the transition to electric vehicles much more practicable.

Above all the health of our grid should be based on the health and security of our communities with an eye towards the future.

Thank you for your time,

Frank Panzarella

344 Norton St.

New Haven, CT 06511

203-562-2798