



**TESTIMONY
MATT KNICKERBOCKER
FIRST SELECTMAN, TOWN OF BETHEL
ON BEHALF OF
THE CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF SMALL TOWNS
BEFORE THE ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
SEPT 8, 2020**

Re: An Act Concerning Emergency Response by Electric Distribution Companies and Revising the Regulation of Other Public Utilities” (LCO 3920)

Dear Senator Needleman, Representative Arconti, Sen. Formica, Rep. Ferraro, and Members of the Committee:

I write to you today in my capacity as president of the Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST), representing 115 member municipalities in Connecticut. COST strongly supports *“An Act Concerning Emergency Response by Electric Distribution Companies and Revising the Regulation of Other Public Utilities”* (LCO 3920). We believe the adoption of this bill would result in vastly improved accountability to the public by electric utilities and will improve storm recovery, service levels and public safety.

We are particularly heartened to see that in the requirement that PURA establish performance standards and metrics, the Committee saw fit to include “municipal engagement” as one of the criteria (Sec. 1-b, lines 13-19). We believe, however, that language should be added to the bill to provide clear and specific requirements that will ensure municipal concerns are addressed, particularly with regard to prioritizing make-safe operations and critical life-safety infrastructure.

The need for additional language in this area is clear. At this committee’s special hearing of August 27th, the following testimony was heard:

- Eversource’s liaison communication system failed to advance life-safety issues to key decision makers within the company, resulting in delayed response to dangerous situations. Unlike previous storms in which each town was assigned its own liaison, these individuals were each assigned multiple towns. They were clearly overburdened and not supported by Eversource senior management with timely and accurate information.
- Eversource did not communicate with, nor did they involve municipal officials in asset allocation decisions at any point in the recovery process.
- Eversource overruled previously agreed upon make-safe protocols in favor of following their own internal priorities concerning storm recovery, without communication with municipal officials.



Therefore, we respectfully request that the Committee consider the following additions to the legislation:

1. Require the electric utilities to meet with each town CEO and/or Emergency Operations staff a minimum of once per year to identify and catalog critical infrastructure facility locations, agree upon recovery plans and priorities, and provide training to municipal staff to ensure priority rankings are mutually agreed upon.
2. Require the electric utility to adhere to make safe protocols as mutually agreed upon by the municipalities and Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS).

Close communication with municipalities is critical to the success of any storm recovery operation. Municipal police, highway crews and emergency operations staff can quickly and efficiently locate and assign the proper priority levels to all downed power lines and trees. When properly coordinated, municipal highway crews and utility crews working together are capable of highly efficient road and tree clearing operations.

Unfortunately, based on our most recent experience with Eversource with recovery from TS Isaias, our members have little confidence that such close coordination will occur without a specific mandate by the General Assembly and by PURA.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments.

Sincerely yours,

Matt Knickerbocker

Matthew Knickerbocker
First Selectman, Town of Bethel
President, Council of Small Towns