



State of Connecticut

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STATE CAPITOL

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TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

Testimony

Energy and Technology Committee Forum on Response to Tropical Storm Isaias

August 27, 2020

Dear Honorable Chairman Needleman, Chairman Arconti, Honorable Ranking Members Formica and Ferraro, and Honorable Members of the Energy and Technology Committee:

Thank you very much for conducting this hearing today to discuss how Eversource planned for and responded to tropical storm Isaias. Connecticut residents deserve far better from their utility company and need answers as to what happened, why and how Eversource will improve going forward.

PURA and legislators must play a more active role in overseeing our State's utilities. As part of this role, both of us need to ensure that our utility companies and their officials are held accountable for the lack of communication and effectiveness in responding to the needs of our constituents and their customers who have a lack of any choice regarding the subject service, or more accurately, lack thereof. PURA and this body must hold those in charge accountable for what happened and ensure that it does not happen again.

Everyone understands Tropical Storm Isaias hit Connecticut extremely hard on Tuesday August 4, 2020. Everyone also agrees that the level of communication received from Eversource was completely insufficient and unbelievably inaccurate. It goes without saying that having roads unsafe for over a week is unacceptable, let alone having power out for even longer. The amount and accuracy of communications to municipalities must improve dramatically.

Wilton and New Canaan went days without crews and when they finally arrived, on numerous occasions the crews sat idly by for long periods of time doing nothing because supervisors were not communicating with the crews as to what they should be doing and where.

I was told Eversource had out of state crews working in Fairfield County staying in New Jersey and Massachusetts. There must be a better way to house the out of state crews closer to where they are working, whether it's a temporary structure built by the National Guard or better planning in advance to reserve rooms closer to where crews will be working.

I had dozens of complaints about the complete breakdown of communication with not only customers but also all town leaders in New Canaan and Wilton.

Please have Eversource answer the following questions:

- What changed in the emergency response plan over the last two years, both with respect to communications with municipalities and assignment and coordination of crews? Why were those changes made? In past storms, New Canaan had an Eversource employee in the emergency operations center coordinating the make safe and repair efforts with town employees which worked extremely well. Why was that not done with Isaias?
- Please provide the number of employees who had a duty to communicate with municipalities directly in coordinating make safe and repair efforts over the last two years and how, if at all, those numbers changed. Were said employees trained differently on how they were tasks to each municipality? Did the policy change? If so, why?
- How many employees were on the payroll who were trained linemen able to make safe and actual repair work on the ground and how has that number changed each year over the last decade? Please list the company's profit for each year over that same decade as communicated to shareholders listed with total number of employees.
- Why were reported outages and estimates of return of service so inaccurate, particularly on-line and what are the plans to improve same?
- What was the percentage of calls that went unanswered during Isaias and for the 14 days thereafter?
- What are the specific plans to improve communication and coordination with municipalities going forward?
- Why has Eversource opposed 2019 HB 6239 and all similar bills before?
- Wouldn't competition be good for ratepayers?
- How does Eversource explain why Connecticut residents pay some of the highest energy rates in the United States? How can those rates be reduced? When will that happen?
- What efforts have been made to hire on an as needed part-time basis retired linemen during emergencies?
- What were the improvements made to increase the reliability of the power supply in New Canaan and Wilton over the last two years and what was the cost of same? What are the planned improvements in New Canaan and Wilton regarding said improvements going forward, when and at what costs?

- What are the tree cutting plans for New Canaan and Wilton over the next two years?
- What would the costs be per mile to put the power lines underground and when was that estimate made and by whom? Are there any plans to work with municipalities to bury power lines at a shared cost, and if not, would that be something Eversource would consider going forward?
- Please provide a detailed management chart and contact information for employees responsible for all aspects of supply and support for New Canaan and Wilton.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom O'Dea".

Tom O'Dea
State Representative
125th District