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Testimony
Energy & Technology Committee
August 27, 2020

Senator Kevin Kelly Testimony on Utility Company Response to Tropical Storm Isaias

The response to Tropical Storm Isaias by Connecticut utility companies, Eversource in particular, was disastrous in many cases and fell far short of the customer service and competence ratepayers deserve. It was unacceptable that so many people waited so long for power restoration, and moreover, that Eversource demonstrated a complete breakdown in communication to towns and ratepayers during the emergency and response efforts.

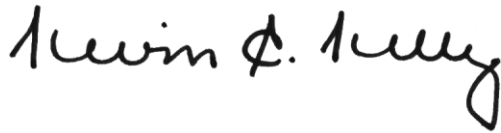
Speaking with constituents and local town officials about their struggles in the aftermath of the storm, it is clear to me that Eversource failed to provide the quality customer service and responsiveness necessary during these emergency circumstances. It is also clear that this was a management issue that is not a reflection of the people working on the front-lines who worked extremely hard, spending days away from their families, to restore power and address safety issues. That being said, the management breakdown must be addressed head on.

Many town officials struggled to get answers and updates from Eversource not only directly after the storm, but also over a week after the storm. Their pressing questions and requests for help remained outstanding for days in many situations. Ratepayers also struggled not only because of the extended power outages, but because of Eversource's communication failures. The utility company's reporting system crashed in the hours during and after the storm. Residents waited for days for updates about power restoration estimates, many people not having any idea if their outage was reported and how long they needed to prepare to support their family without power in their homes. We all can understand that responding to a massive storm and vast damage can take time. But the lack of communication throughout the process was unacceptable on every level and needs to be addressed.

I also find it extremely concerning that two state utilities submitted dramatically different weather predictions and response plans to the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) in anticipation of the storm, yet PURA seemingly did not raise any alarms or questions about the disparity between UI and Eversource's forecasts. According to PURA, UI classified the storm as a "level 3 event," which anticipates that 30% to 50% of UI customers would be affected, with outages that could last five days or more. This was an accurate assessment according to regulators. Eversource meanwhile prepared for a milder "level 4 event," which anticipates 10% to 29% of customers affected, with outages lasting two to six days. This was obviously very inaccurate leaving them significantly unprepared. For a state as small as Connecticut, it is shocking that two utility companies would have different classifications for the same storm and no one questions the disparity. This could have been an opportunity to question Eversource's lower storm categorization early on and better prepare a response plan to help people and communities.

As the Energy & Technology Committee investigates the utility companies' storm responses, I ask members to pursue a robust inquiry into Eversource's preparation and response to Tropical Storm Isaias. This investigation also must include an examination of PURA and how the authority oversees Eversource. PURA approved Eversource's rate increases they have now agreed to go back and revisit following public outcries. But PURA is also responsible to ratepayers and needs to be held accountable. At a time when Eversource's second-quarter profits totaled \$252 million, up significantly from the same quarter a year ago, the utility is still increasing rates and failing to deliver in emergency situations. It is infuriating and ratepayers deserve better.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony on behalf of my constituents and the 21st Senate District.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin C. Kelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large, stylized 'K' and 'C'.

Kevin C. Kelly, State Senator (R-21)