



TOWN OF MADISON
CONNECTICUT 06443

BOARD OF SELECTMEN

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First Selectwoman

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Alfred J. Goldberg
Scott M. Murphy
Bruce H. Wilson, Jr.

August 21, 2020

Public Utilities Regulatory Commission (PURA)
10 Franklin Square
New Britain, CT 06051

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for providing the Town of Madison the opportunity to share with PURA our observations about Eversource's response and restoration efforts in the after-math of Tropical Storm Isaias. The delayed response by Eversource to this weather event impacted the health and safety of many of our residents, caused considerable financial loss to many in our community, impaired our emergency response efforts, and hurt our local economy.

On the night of August 4th, more than 81% of Madison was without power and more than 60 of our roads were blocked for emergency access. Here are some important facts surrounding the restoration timeline for our Town, including some critical infrastructure:

- Over 24 hours before Eversource crews were visibly working in our Town;
- Over 48 hours to restore power to our downtown;
- Over 4 days to restore power to a low-income, senior & disabled housing complex;
- Over 5 days to restore power to a main shopping plaza that serves North Madison;
- Over 6 days to restore reliable power to a school building that was to host our Presidential Primary. Power was not fully restored until approximately 5 p.m. the day before the Primary;
- Over 7 days to ensure all downed wires were safe, and all neighborhoods were accessible.

Although we were relieved that Eversource eventually deployed significant resources to our community to restore power, we wanted to share our observations on areas that were most problematic in their initial response efforts.

I. Breakdown in Process

After most major storm events in recent years, Eversource had positioned locally “Make Safe” Crews ready to go as soon as weather permitted to work with our first responders to clear blocked roads. By 7:30 p.m. on August 4th, the town submitted a list of over 50 blocked roads to Eversource. Rather than working with their teams overnight to safely remove downed wires, we were told by our Community Liaison that Eversource would not be providing a Make Safe Crew that evening, and only handling life threatening calls. The next day we learned that no such crew would be provided since Eversource was moving to full restoration mode. This meant that our first responders were left standing on the sidelines, unable to safely clear downed wires and provide emergency access throughout many parts of our town. In the past, Make Safe crews were standard protocol and sent out immediately after the storm event to work in partnership with our crews. This process worked in previous storms - the new process did not.

In addition, there is existing technology that would allow first responders to report damage to power lines in a more timely, accurate way, called iRestore. Our Emergency Management Director suggested this technology to Eversource in previous years to improve communications and help speed up the restoration process, but saw no effort by them to roll-out new any technologies to address this known problem.

II. Inadequate Operational Resources

Eversource failed to adequately staff many of its functions in preparation for Isaias. Madison’s Community Liaison was responsible for 11 towns during this storm, essentially setting this person up for failure. In previous major weather events, our Community Liaison was oftentimes seated in our Emergency Operations Center and worked lock step with our Emergency Management Director. For this storm, she was based remotely outside of Madison and asked to handle an overwhelming number off towns all equally crushed by this storm. This meant very little information was shared with us about the actual work being

done in our town, or about any possible timetable for restoration. Our operations team knew essentially no more than the general public about crew locations and timelines.

Two days after the storm and with minimal support from Eversource, we were re-assigned with another representative. This person did an incredible job working closely with our team remotely, but was only as good as the information received from Eversource operations personnel, which was limited.

In addition, the failure to dedicate personnel resources to the Make Safe function in the initial wake of the storm, significantly impaired the Town's ability to adequately respond to emergency situations. This was a pre-planned operational decision by Eversource that could have been avoided.

III. Poor Communication

We felt there was a significant breakdown in communication in the after-math of the storm. This included external communication between Eversource and the Town, and internally between Eversource's Community Liaison and Eversource operational crews.

External Communications: Although there may have been some Eversource personnel in Madison on the evening of the storm, the Town was never made aware of their presence nor were we ever told what restoration activities they would be undertaking. We were in the dark. In addition, our Emergency Dispatch reported every downed wire/outage situation directly to Eversource's dispatch as soon as it was reported to us. However, we found that Eversource would later claim they were not notified of a specific situation. We have the recordings and documentation to support all communications from our Dispatch to Eversource.

And finally, when the restoration process was fully underway, our public works department was not given adequate information on where Eversource needed our assistance. Oftentimes, our crews were basing their work directives on information shared with us by residents or reports from the Madison Police Department and our Fire Departments, rather than receiving information directly from Eversource's operations team. This caused many delays and an inefficient response to oftentimes urgent situations.

Internal Communications: As part of the emergency response, we were asked to refrain from any direct communications between Town staff and Eversource operational personnel. The expectation was we should go through our Community Liaison. However, our Emergency

Operations team often felt that the Community Liaison was two steps behind Eversource's line personnel. Oftentimes their assigned representative was unable to provide us simple information on where crews were working and why. When the restoration process began in earnest, we were often given stale information on neighborhood work plans. This created additional delays in allowing our teams to complete their jobs.

IV. Failure of Technology

Eversource experienced significant technical issues during and after the storm that prevented many customers from reporting their outage via the website, call center or through the mobile app. These problems persisted for days, which meant restoration teams did not have the most accurate, up to date information. Even a full week after the storm, we had many calls from residents without power complaining that Eversource was showing their properties as restored on the website. This was an extremely frustrating experience for our residents and required our staff to follow-up on these complaints individually.

We ask that PURA, in partnership with the state legislature, determine a way to ensure that Eversource be held accountable for its operational decisions after major storm events and make strategic investments to reduce long-term outages in the future. This includes demanding changes to operational response plans to improve performance and reduce outage times, but also requiring financial compensation to those residents who have incurred significant loss from a delayed outage. Our community should not be asked to bear the costs of poor planning and decision-making. It also might be helpful that Eversource provide some financial assistance to those customers, especially those in vulnerable populations, to purchase generators or other forms of emergency power back-up.

Please understand that none of our concerns raised in this letter are directed at the everyday staff and hardworking line workers who work tirelessly to restore and maintain power in our community. They are directed at the long-term strategic management of a highly profitable corporation that has a monopoly on a critical service for our residents. Going forward, we must recognize that climate change, the age of our state's utility infrastructure, and our state's extensive tree canopy, will continue to result in future outages for decades to come. We must start taking significant steps now to ensure that Eversource, and our communities, are prepared for the future.

We are happy to answer any questions or provide you with additional insight on these critical issues regarding Madison's experience with Eversource in the wake of Tropical Storm Isaias. Thank you for your consideration.

Kind Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peggy Lyons". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "L".

Peggy Lyons
First Selectwoman

CC: State Senator Christine Cohen
State Representative Noreen Kokoruda
Madison Board of Selectmen