

## **8/20 Testimony of the Public Power Coalition**

My name is Jen Chantrtanapichate, I am with NYC-DSA and the Public Power Coalition.

Thank you Senators Parker, Kaminsky, Comrie, Brooks, Gaughran, Jackson and Assemblymembers Cusick, Englebright, Paulin, Zebrowski, Thiele Jr., and Braunstein.

As you can see by the number of chairs I just named, this Joint Public Hearing on the power and communication failures from Tropical Storm Isaias touch upon nearly every aspect of our society.

Each of your committees along with others are impacted by our investor-owned utilities' failures during this storm. That is because, especially during this COVID-19 crisis, energy is a human right. People having to wait over a week for electricity during the dead of summer is unacceptable. Don't get me wrong, the utility workers who tirelessly toiled to get our grid back up are heroes who worked around the clock, but the grid shouldn't have been so susceptible in the first place. We are calling out their bosses, investor-owned utilities like Con Edison, who time and time again leave us susceptible to outages and vulnerable to increasing climate chaos while raising our rates.

This may sound extreme but it's the unfortunate truth. If it weren't, we wouldn't be participating in these hearings every year. Check the records — we testified similarly just last September after a wave of Con Ed blackouts and brownouts plagued New Yorkers. These shouldn't be accepted as annual burdens, but we've come to rely on these annual failures, threats, hearings, and speeches.

Our Governor has threatened their licenses now each of the last three summers like clockwork. Back in November of 2012 right after Sandy, he said, quote: "I believe the system is archaic and obsolete in many ways. They are basically one of the last monopolies. The utility system we have was designed for a different time and for a different place, it is a 1950s system. They have failed the consumers. The management has failed the consumers. We're going to have to look at a ground-up redesign. New Yorkers should not suffer because electric utilities did not reasonably prepare for this eventuality." Unquote.

I want to also highlight stories of people we talked to in the dark on the streets of New York during month's blackouts. We spoke to Joan Apere, a Brooklyn resident of more than 30 years, who had just dealt with a blackout two weeks earlier when her family lost power to Isaias again, losing all her food. When asked about Con Ed, she said her experience has been terrible, asking us "why do we always have to be in the dark?" We spoke to a mother in Brooklyn who struggled to feed and calm her kids. We spoke to a woman in the Bronx whose entire family suffers from asthma and struggled to find ways to use their breathing machines. Another father we spoke to in the Bronx still without power days later, and after throwing out his food, lamented "there's no money here, so Con Ed takes their time."

I live in Brooklyn and work in Manhattan so I can speak about Con Ed specifically and how that ground-up redesign never happened, making New Yorkers suffer. Only in December, after multiple judges' interventions and 5 years after they were supposed to say so in accordance with the Moreland Commission after Hurricane Sandy did they start looking into the costs of burying wires underground. And this storm became their second largest outage ever, trailing only Sandy.

Irene, Sandy, and now Isaias, all happened within the last 8 years. They are the three largest weather related outages our utilities have faced ever. The UN's top scientists with the IPCC report state that we must transition to a renewable-based economy by 2030 to avoid the worst of climate catastrophe. Other top scientists state we will face Sandy-level storms every five years as early as 2030.

The landmark state law you passed last year, the CLCPA, mandates at least 70% renewables by 2030 and 100% by 2040. I know PSC Chairman Rhodes constantly talks about an on-ramp to renewable penetration, but currently we are still waiting in the terminal. We are at 5% wind and solar statewide. We know that with the scaling down of Indian Point there is a tremendous opportunity for large -scale projects in wind and solar with good-paying, union jobs for New Yorkers. Let's invest in them instead of new fossil fuel infrastructure or importing Canadian hydropower.

We know that the renewable energy grid of the future must be a distributed energy grid that is resilient in the face of greater and stronger storms. We also know, just as we testified last year, that these investor-owned utilities' entire business model is predicated on extracting as much profit from the current system. As Upton Sinclair famously said: "It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon his not understanding it." Their existence is predicated on short-term profits, continuing, extending, and upgrading fossil fuel infrastructure, all to increase returns to investors. It is antithetical to long-term sustainability.

Luckily, with the CLCPA you have a mandate, and we have an alternative. NYPA is the largest publicly owned power authority in the nation. Yet, for some reason it is not allowed to own new renewable generation or transmission infrastructure. You can do something about it. Assembly Bill 8937, and Senate Bill 7243 introduced by Assemblymember Carroll and Senator Parker do exactly this. NYPA is already 83% renewable and on a peak day can meet a quarter of the State's electric needs. It owns a third of the state's backbone transmission infrastructure. Let's expand NYPA and grow the resilience of our state's renewables now. Additionally, we do not need these investor-owned utilities. We can have publicly owned, democratically controlled utilities with explicit mandates to meet the CLCPA guidelines.

We know that these storms will keep coming. A changing energy grid is inevitable as well. We can have one that fails with each extreme weather event leaving New Yorkers to suffer — from heatwaves, to wind, to storms — or we can invest in our future.

We know this decade will have to be the decade of the Green New Deal, the decade we transitioned to a renewable energy economy that makes us healthier, more resilient, and stronger. With Public Power, New Yorkers will have lower rates, more resilient grids, greater democracy, and a state agency with a mandate to meet a state law — not private corporations that shirk responsibility until a judge tells them they must release their report 5 years after the deadline. With the climate crisis, we cannot miss the deadline. Please, as our legislators, come together and pass the Public Power bills. Thank you.