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September 20, 2011

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Hartford, CT 06106

Public Safety and Security Committee Members
Legislative Office Building, Room 3600
Hartford, CT 06106

Labor and Public Employees Committee Members
Legislative Office Building, Room 3800
Hartford, CT 06106

Planning and Development Committee Members
Legislative Office Building, Room 2100
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Colleagues:

Please accept this letter as my written testimony as you move forward with your examination of the quality and effectiveness of the state's and utility companies' readiness and response to Tropical Storm Irene.

As the state Representative from Newtown, a community significantly impacted by this storm, I am grateful that you have exercised your power to hear directly from representatives of utility companies, workers, communications firms and municipalities, as well as from members of the general public. This is exactly the type of representation that Connecticut residents deserve at this time.

Before I offer my thoughts and observations, I want to first thank the local leadership in Newtown. First Selectman E. Patricia Llodra, along with the incredibly talented and dedicated Emergency Operations Team and volunteer emergency service personnel, did an admirable job communicating with residents and addressing many challenging situations throughout our community's recovery efforts. I could not be more proud of the way Newtown's leaders and volunteers handled this situation and want to publicly acknowledge their work on our residents' behalf.

I would also like to thank the local press and all the Newtown residents who utilized social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to communicate with their friends and neighbors to ensure critical information was disseminated as quickly as possible.

With that said, I want to share with you some of my thoughts and concerns with regards to this situation. I have received tremendous feedback from Newtown residents, the First Selectman, the Director of Emergency Management, the Director of the local Public Health Department, the Superintendent of Schools, the Chief of Police, the Director of Information Technology, Newtown's office of Social Services, the Director of Emergency Communications, Newtown's Land Use Department and many other leaders in my community. Based on these conversations and on my own observations of this situation, there are a number of concerns that must be addressed in a timely manner by both the state and the utility companies here in Connecticut.

Communication

The management of and response to any emergency situation depends on the dissemination of timely and accurate information before, during, and after the event during the recovery phase. For the most part, local and statewide media outlets ensured that Connecticut residents were well informed about the path of the storm and the necessary precautions to take to keep themselves and their families safe. Local municipalities also took measures to ensure their residents knew about recovery efforts to support those who were without power, food, water, and other commodities.

While I applaud the towns and media outlets for their efforts, I must point out that I was taken aback by Connecticut Light and Power's inability to effectively communicate with their customer base and local elected officials. **This highlights a gaping hole in our emergency preparedness.**

For example, while Newtown residents waited in the dark, Connecticut Light and Power offered vague, conflicting, and often times misleading information to our Emergency Operations Team. This not only made it very difficult for local officials to trust Connecticut Light and Power, but it also made it very difficult for municipal officials to communicate Connecticut Light and Power's message to our constituencies. A breakdown in communication can make an emergency situation a disastrous situation, and therefore, we must continue to press Connecticut Light and Power on this issue.

At one point, CL&P's website indicated that Newtown's power would be restored last, at 11:59 p.m. on Wednesday, September 7, 2011, only to find out that this information was inaccurate and misleading, creating a significant stir within the community. I also learned that Connecticut Light and Power customer service representatives were allegedly telling their customers that it was the town's fault that roads were impassible. This could not have been further from the truth as the town cleared all it legally and safely could. In fact, the impassible roads were due to Connecticut Light and Power's lack of tree crews who are specially trained at working with compromised trees entangled with wires.

The Newtown Emergency Operations Team held meetings to coordinate efforts and to share information with Connecticut Light and Power about emergencies and situations unique to our community. While the limited linemen and local crews assigned to Newtown were receptive to the initial feedback, it appeared there was a breakdown in communicating these community-specific needs to Connecticut Light and Power executives.

As you may know, Newtown is geographically one of the largest communities in the state with residential neighborhoods in highly forested areas. Understanding this simple piece of geological trivia, one would assume that the assessment of damage and removal of trees compromised with wires across a community such as Newtown would require more than the two crews initially assigned after the storm. Had Connecticut Light and Power consulted with our local elected officials during the assessment phase, I believe CL&P could have conducted a more effective and timely assessment of our community's needs.

It is clear, based on this event, that Connecticut Light and Power needs to develop a mechanism to strengthen their relationship and communication with local public works crews and chief elected officials. Developing a more meaningful relationship between the utility companies and the municipalities will undoubtedly make Connecticut residents safer.

One way to keep residents, emergency responders, and chief elected officials up to date on road closures, downed wires, and other transportation related issues is to have a centralized statewide system that could track such incidents during emergencies. Currently, the State of Connecticut has an "Interactive Travel Information Map" that should be expanded and utilized during times of emergencies. This map can be viewed here: http://www.dotdata.ct.gov/iti/master_iti.html. Communicating this information in real-time, allows emergency responders, utility companies, and local officials to address situations unique to each community in a more timely and strategic manner. When it comes to technology, we need to create redundant systems that can be accessed by local and state officials.

Another area that needs to be probed is the statewide emergency communications system. While Newtown utilizes the CodeRed Emergency Notification System, the state is connected with the Everbridge System that allegedly is backlogged and inefficient. These systems should be developed and utilized by the state to communicate with residents about important public health, safety and emergency management announcements. While

many mayors and first selectman utilized these systems as a way of communicating, the state should consider doing the same, or developing a similar system with the utility companies so that they may communicate directly with their customer base.

Public Health and Emergency Response

Public Health needs to be at the forefront of these discussions because a community without power, refrigeration, and water for an extended period of time can create a significant public health emergency. In fact, one section of Newtown was issued an advisory to boil their water during the recovery phase after the storm. Unfortunately, the section of town that the State Department of Public Health noticed in the press was incorrect and misleading. This created an unnecessary stir for some residents and a lack of urgency for others who in fact needed to be noticed about the advisory. Again, the sharing of accurate information is absolutely critical in ensuring the health and well-being of our residents.

While many people were inconvenienced by this storm and the lack of power, others' health and well-being were seriously jeopardized. For example, many people need electricity to pump well water to their homes and to keep their medications refrigerated. There should be a more concerted effort and understanding of the need for power in areas that rely heavily on wells and grinder pumps to support their needs.

This presented a problem in Newtown for those individuals who were elderly, ill, or who were otherwise incapacitated and unable to access water over the course of a week. Newtown's Department of Social Services, Department of Public Health, and the Office of the First Selectman were able to identify some of these individuals and respond accordingly.

While there were many significant hazards across the 60 forested square acres of Newtown, there is one situation that stands out. Picture yourself or someone you love, eight months pregnant trapped in her house without any access to leave because there are trees and wires down. Now picture that same woman hiking through the woods to borrow a car to get to work because she could not afford to miss a day. In Newtown, we did not have to imagine this as it was our reality. These are the unique situations that arise in communities and deserve attention. Despite local officials' efforts to address this early, it took CL&P four days to begin clearing that particular road. To me, this is unacceptable. Unfortunately, there are dozens of similar stories from my community that could have been avoided had CL&P consulted with the municipal leaders.

Volunteer Recruitment and Utilization

As Vice Chair of the Public Health Committee and a member of the Connecticut Public Health Emergency Advisory Council, I am always watching to see how systems interact, where there are breakdowns, and ways to improve service delivery and communication. While most of this discussion has already taken place at the local level, there is one

component of emergency preparedness that is wroth sharing with you. Mobilizing, training, and deploying volunteers is perhaps one of the most under utilized supports in any emergency, this one included. In fact, when all communication broke down, I organized a group of volunteers to drop flyers with information on where people can access food, water, and shelter to over 500 households. These same flyers, updated daily, were also distributed by town workers in public places at the direction of the First Selectman. Volunteers in times of crisis are critical and I do not believe the state utilized our volunteers effectively.

As many of you know, Newtown is home to the Second Company Governor's Horse Guard, a CERT unit that is able to provide support functions to the state during times of emergency. Newtown needed these volunteers to help distribute commodities and ensure the public was kept safe and healthy; however, the town was denied their request to activate this CERT team for support. This is unconscionable at a time of great need and I could not be more disappointed with this decision.

Finally, the state should have utilized volunteers to secure critical commodities for Newtown and surrounding communities. While I appreciate the state establishing a commodities distribution center in East Hartford, it was very difficult to access these critical supplies. If we cannot get these resources to the people, they are no good. The Horse Guard, the National Guard, and perhaps local volunteers should have been utilized to transport these commodities to our communities.

Questions to be Answered

1. Did CL&P have a thought-out action plan to restore power quickly? Was the government made aware of that plan?
2. What is CL&P's plan to address needs that may be unique to the community or urgent in nature?
3. How do they coordinate with local and state leaders to ensure a rapid response to emergency situations and unique community needs?
4. Are there appropriate staffing levels at CL&P to address emergency situations?
5. Why weren't crews called in before the storm hit?
6. Does CL&P recognize and prioritize power restoration for communities that rely heavily on wells, grinder pumps and septic systems?
7. What are currently the tree trimming and maintenance practices? Do these need to be revised?
8. Should customers expect to see a reduction in their bill as a result of the power outage?
9. Will the customers be charged, through a rate increase, to cover the costs of restoring their power?
10. What recourse does a customer have who has lost business/revenue because of a slow restoration of service?
11. How will CL&P more effectively communicate with their customers and local elected officials in the future?

Again, thank you all for your continued interest in this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or if you would like to further discuss my thoughts and concerns.

All my best,

Christopher Lyddy

Cc: Governor Dannel Malloy
State Team Organized for the Review of Management of Irene
Public Health Committee Members
Connecticut Light and Power
E. Patricia Llodra, First Selectman, Town of Newtown
William Halstead, Director of Emergency Management, Town of Newtown