Communications Workers of America

The Connecticut Union of Telephone Workers, Inc.

AFL-CIO

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William F. Henderson
President

September 26, 2011

Re: Testimony Legislative Hearing
Tropical Storm Irene

Good afternoon to my distinguished State Representatives and members of our State Senate,

My name is William F. Henderson III and I am honored to hold the position of president of the Communications Workers of America Local 1298. My local currently represents all of the AT&T workers in Connecticut as well as the AT&T Wireless workers in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and the technicians in Vermont and New Hampshire. I have 41 years of service at AT&T/SBC/SNET the last position I held in the field was a Power Technician. With me today is David Weidlich my Vice President of the Plant Department responsible for the Eastern part of the state who is also here today to assist in answering any questions that you may have at the conclusion of my testimony. I realize that our time is limited today so we have prepared an in-depth report on my comments drilling down deeper with facts and figures which are intended to substantiate the issues that I will touch on in my report.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today on the aftermath of tropical storm Irene that had such a devastating effect on our state and it's citizens, for this is the first time that labor, to my knowledge, has been invited to speak on this matter ...unfortunately. I say unfortunately because we have been the ***canary in the coal mine*** predicting for years that this would happen,

and maybe even worse case scenario, if we really had the hurricane that had been forecast, for a week prior to Irene coming ashore. We have been to the legislature, the D.P.U.C. and any other body that would listen to us report that laying off over 1,600 telephone workers in the last 9 years would have a devastating effect on service. Routine maintenance has been sacrificed to a degree of almost non-existence. We have robbed from Peter so much to pay Paul, Peter just checked into the homeless shelter. Senator Prague was correct in raising the question why did that rotten telephone pole in her town fall down and take two other polls with it. And why did it take AT&T more than 24 hours to get a line truck out there to start to work on replacing those polls it when the power company was there in 20 minutes after the trouble was reported. These are the facts: More than 50 linemen and over 100 installers have lost their jobs at AT&T. AT&T used to identify rotten polls on a systematic scheduled maintenance plan and replace them before their life expectancy was exceeded. We have polls that have red "X"s scheduled for replacement for more than 5 years in the field and a lot of these polls came down during this storm. The other part of this equation is that AT&T is using in some cases substandard ill equipped, poorly trained out of state contractors for a major part of their line work force, while our members sit at home when these out of hours incidents take place. Contractors were called in Sunday for storm restoration while our construction people came in Monday morning and started loading polls. Why you might ask??? Because they can!!! No one but no one is holding their feet to the fire. It seems to be cheaper to pay a fine than do the job right. "Tell that to half a million residents of Connecticut who lost power because of these rotten poles that fell down and should have been replaced causing their freezers to defrost because they were without power for a week.

We have a process in Connecticut that not only failed to perform under pressure because of lost jobs but because we have now severed the cord of local knowledge of our state. Repair and dispatch centers are no longer in our state .We have allowed them to

be moved to Texas, Illinois, Michigan and yes as Representative Betty Boukus pointed out, she got sent to the Philippines to take care of her service problem. Those repair and dispatch calls used to be handled by a person in Meriden who knew where Columbia was, and not some place in South America. Communications with the Government agencies may have worked beautifully, but don't tell that to the customers that I talked to. They waited literally hours on the phone to talk to a real person in Connecticut because their medical alert system was down or the senior citizen that had relied on the premises that their phone would work even when they lost commercial power and had no idea what VOIP was. I can honestly say AT&T came up short with customer contact through out this Tropical storm Irene and there has to be better job done in educating the public and identifying critical services. Many customers' trouble tickets were automatically scrubbed when commercial power in their area was restored and forced them to call in a second or third time to get trouble ticket generated because the lines to their homes were down on top of the power outages. On the other hand it was reported that as many as 5 technicians were dispatched to the same location because of a problem in an automated dispatch system. This inefficient dispatching caused further delays in deploying generators to remote terminal locations compounded by the fact that vehicles that were equipped with generators didn't have the proper cord and were rendered useless. The generators that were shipped in from King of Persia Pennsylvania on Monday were not compatible for towing with many of our trucks, which also caused delays in deployment. As the spokesman for AT&T Mr. Emra stated last Monday "Miss placed Nostalgia, "no just good service communications that are dependable and reliable that have back up systems in place so when we have a real hurricane commerce won't stop".

Our government has to step up to the plate and learn from this experience. Our leaders have to put together a task force that won't dance around the troubles that we just came through but identify the problems and not point fingers but do an honest assessment and put

in place corrective action that will lead to real solutions. I'm not asking you my elected representatives to do it alone there is a lot of work to be done and the Telephone workers of CWA 1298 stand ready to assist in any way we can. We understand there are new technologies but these are not new principles. It will be a long journey but as we all know any journey starts with a first step and that's what we are doing today. Thank you again for this opportunity to address you.