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Supporting Proposed Bill:

HB 5544 – AN ACT CONCERNING STORM PREPARATION AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE

ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
March 2012

Senator Fonfara, Representative Nardello, members of the committee: my name is William Henderson III. I am proud to serve as the President of Communications Workers of America Local 1298, representing more than 4,000 telecommunications workers across New England.

I am here to speak in favor of HB 5544 – AN ACT CONCERNING STORM PREPARATION AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE.

Last week, I testified before the Committee on Planning and Development in favor of HB 5407 – AN ACT CONCERNING PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC UTILITIES. As you know, that bill calls for the Commissioner of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) to submit to the legislature his recommendations for performance standards for utility companies.

We have confidence that Commissioner Esty can conduct such a review capably and with an outcome that benefits the people of Connecticut.

Having said that, I must compliment the Energy and Technology Committee for crafting a truly robust and thorough review process for the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) to investigate, examine and report conclusions and recommendations to the legislature on the issue of storm preparedness and emergency response.

Communications Workers of America Local 1298 would be ready, willing and able to participate in such a review process, and to engage the expertise and personnel of our national union to assist as well, to make sure that Connecticut residents are not short-changed by AT&T or any other telecommunications provider on these critical issues of storm preparation and emergency response.

The fact is – and this has been independently confirmed repeatedly by DPUC, the Office of Consumer Counsel and former Connecticut Attorney General Richard Blumenthal – that AT&T has so drastically reduced Connecticut jobs and allowed shoddy practices by a host of vendor operations, they have seriously compromised their readiness for major weather events.

One indisputable example of this is pole replacement. This critical job is no longer done by CWA-represented AT&T workers. It is 100% vended out, with vendors clearly installing poles less securely – literally not digging deep enough holes.

It will not take PURA long to understand the consequences of such practices by AT&T when a hurricane or blizzard hits our state. And this is just one example of a long list of job-cutting, service-reducing steps AT&T has taken that have reduced our ranks by nearly 2,000 workers, while the company regularly fails to meet minimum performance standards, even as it reaps millions in profits from our state.

I will conclude by repeating what I told members of the Committee on Planning and Development: Without proper staffing, there is no reason to expect AT&T's performance during a crisis to be anything but what it was during Irene and Alfred – a disastrous response to a disaster.

Thank you.