

TESTIMONY OF
THE UNITED ILLUMINATING COMPANY
REGARDING
Raised H.B. 6471 - AN ACT CONCERNING AN ACT CONCERNING TREE TRIMMING BY
UTILITIES

ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

MARCH 5, 2013

LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING

Good afternoon Senator Duff, Representative Reed and members of the Energy & Technology Committee. My name is John Mitchell and I am the Manager, System Maintenance for The United Illuminating Company.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of **HB 6471, AN ACT CONCERNING TREE TRIMMING BY UTILITIES**. The proposed bill provides that a utility company may cut or trim trees within a utility clearance zone and may cut or trim trees on private, municipal or state property after sufficient notification to a homeowner or tree warden. This bill also provides for an appeals process should a homeowner or tree warden object to a utility company trimming its trees.

This bill is important to ensure an efficient process to maintain a utility clearance zone.

Beginning in 2010, the State of Connecticut and UI's service territory in particular, experienced significant weather patterns, including high winds and precipitation. These weather patterns caused severe damage to UI's electric system and extended electric service outages. During these storms, many trees and tree limbs fell on our wire and cable systems causing damage to the electric infrastructure.

Some of the fallen trees and limbs were within the utility right-of-ways; others were on private property. Many of these fallen trees, both healthy and hazardous, had fall lines that extended to our utility facilities. A tree that is 60 or 70 feet tall will easily reach the opposite side of a 40-60 foot roadway and cause serious damage to electric conductors and equipment in its path.

For years, UI, in collaboration with municipal and state tree wardens, have strived to maintain safe clearances between trees and overhead electric equipment. However, under current state law, utility companies must obtain consent from property owners or adjacent property owners prior to trimming, cutting or removing hazardous tree limbs and trees that encroach or endanger electric facilities. This process is both burdensome and inefficient. If a homeowner does not permit a hazardous tree to be trimmed, there is no timely appeal process and utility clearance zones remain exposed to possible damage from high winds and other weather patterns.

As a result, unmaintained trees remain encroached into utility clearance zones for many months prior to a utility company's next cycle of trimming. This increases the potential for a tree to fall during severe weather events. Trees that are not properly maintained to a utility company's specification put the electric system's reliability at risk.

Recently, the State's Vegetation Management Task Force, as well as recommendations from the Townsley/Goodfellow Report and Governor's Two-Storm Panel, all agreed that the state's current tree trimming regulations need to be reviewed to streamline the tree trimming process to gain greater continuity to positively affect electric system reliability.

As a result, the utility companies need efficient and timely responses from homeowners and municipalities.

HB 6471 also presents an opportunity for the state to create a Roadside Vegetation Management program to manage roadside risks. By working jointly, the electric utility and the state and municipal tree wardens, can develop set criteria for establishing a program, and utilize industry standards, to identify hazardous trees, while balancing the protection of the electric system and the needs of the residents.

If a tree does require removal, the Company also offers homeowners suggestions for planting an appropriately-sized, lower-growth tree in the same relative area, in order to eliminate or reduce the threat to the electrical equipment.

UI proposes that the Energy & Technology Committee slightly amend HB 6471 and establish a standard approach from the state level to drive consistency across all municipalities which would provide predictability for planning work and budget forecasts; while ensuring customers in all municipalities share the same benefits and costs.

Under Subsection (e), UI suggests the following changes:

The electric distribution company, the state and municipal tree wardens shall jointly establish a program based on industry standards for identifying hazard trees. Each municipality shall, (1) establish minimum requirements to cut, trim, prune **or remove whole or in part** hazardous trees, (2) provide notice to property owners of any existing hazardous tree and any requirements to cut, trim, prune or remove whole or in part such hazardous tree, and (3) establish enforcement provisions for the cutting, trimming, pruning or removal of any hazardous tree.

The United Illuminating Company supports the **H.B. 6471 - AN ACT CONCERNING TREE TRIMMING BY UTILITIES** and urges the Energy & Technology Committee to give the bill a Favorable Report. Thank you for your attention and I can answer any questions you may have.