

STATEMENT
OF
UNITED ILLUMINATING COMPANY
TO THE ENERGY & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
MARCH 4, 2014
RE:
HB 5408 – AN ACT CONCERNING TREE TRIMMING

Senator Duff, Representative Reed and members of the Energy & Technology Committee. The United Illuminating Company (UI) thanks the Committee for the opportunity to file this statement regarding HB 5408. UI is the electric distribution affiliate of UIL Holdings Corporation headquartered in New Haven, CT.

UI does not oppose nor support the provisions of HB 5408. However, the Company believes that the proposal is not necessary.

In 2013 the Connecticut General Assembly adopted Public Act 13-298 (section 60) to make amendments to the process that utilities, including UI, must follow regarding pruning and/or removal of trees that may interfere with electric distribution facilities. The act allows electric and telecommunications companies to perform vegetation management, including pruning and removing vegetation that jeopardizes utility infrastructure, while retaining compatible vegetation that does not, within a “utility protection zone” (UPZ) to secure the reliability of utility services by protecting wires and other utility infrastructure from trees, shrubs, and other vegetation in the zone.

PA 13-298 also established a process whereby property owners may object to the company’s proposed tree trimming or removal under the care and control of the local tree wardens. The appeals process has specific timelines and requirements on the company and the tree warden who must issue a decision on customer objections. The act also allows either the objecting party or the utility to appeal the tree warden’s decision to the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA). The authority may authorize the pruning or removal of any tree or shrub that is the subject of the hearing if it finds that public convenience and necessity require it.

HB 5408 proposes that the burden of proving that public convenience and necessity require such action shall be on the utility. As a matter of practice, the utility would have already presented its evidence to the tree warden in support of its position regarding an objection to trim or remove tree or trees within the UPZ. PURA would, under most circumstances require the Company to provide the same or additional evidence to support the need for a finding that the pruning or removal of any tree is in the public benefit, regardless of the Company or a property owner is appealing the tree warden’s decision.

If the Committee has any questions regarding this matter, please contact Carlos M. Vázquez, UIL’s Senior Director of Government Relations at 203-521-2455 or Al Carbone at 203-671-4421.