

Teresa Eickel, Interreligious Eco-Justice Network

395 Park Road, West Hartford, CT 06119

Thank you for hearing my testimony today. I am the Executive Director of the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network, a faith-based environmental organization that works with religious communities in CT to inspire and empower them to be good stewards of the earth. As such, we represent hundreds of religious communities and thousands of people of faith in Connecticut. We are the fiscal sponsor and one of the main partners in the CT Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, an organization that knows that we can have well-paying jobs here in CT that are good for our economy and our planet. We would like to issue our complete support for capping the fixed charge and \$10 for individuals and \$25 for small businesses.

Our residents pay the highest fixed charges in New England, a dubious distinction for a state that has fewer jobs now than in 1980. While the profits of major corporations, such as Northeast Utilities, may be up, CT residents still struggle to find work and many of them are either unemployed or underemployed. As a result, they find it challenging to pay their bills and raising the fixed charge means that their electricity bills will increase before they even turn on a light. The utilities have been very forthright about the fact that they are increasing the fixed charge to offset the loss of revenue from energy efficiency and solar programs. This is not only a great hardship on CT residents that are already having trouble paying their bills, it is also not what the fixed charge is intended to do. The fixed charge was intended to pay for access to the grid – the cost of the meter, the line drop, and billing and metering services. It was not intended as a means to recoup lost revenue and to use it that way due to increase energy efficiency and solar installation is not only a slap in the face to people who have participated in those programs, it also flies in the face of the state's stated energy efficiency goals. Capping the fixed charge will help our state's most vulnerable residents, while also rewarding people who have participated in the Energize CT programs through increased savings on their electricity bills. Helping the poor and rewarding people for living in a sustainable manner are two benefits of capping the fixed charge that should be supported by our state legislature.

Increasing the fixed charge has had a negative impact on people's willingness to participate in energy efficiency programs – as I have talked to people about it, they say, "Why bother doing anything? The utilities will just find more ways to take money from me." Universally, the people that I have spoken to are disgusted by this recent increase by the utilities. One of CT's energy goals is to improve energy efficiency in the state, so our policies must support and promote participation in those programs, rather than engender a sense of despair, frustration, and unwillingness to participate.

The small business fee should also be capped at \$25. Our congregations, the ones that run soup kitchens, homeless shelters, and clothing drives, qualify as small businesses. They are all struggling to meet their budgets – increasing the fixed charge negatively impacts their ability to provide support to the community around them.

We recognize the need to modernize the grid and address some larger issues in terms of energy policy, generation, and distribution. However, we deeply believe that capping the fixed charge is something

that can and should be done now, in order to help the residents of our state and the small businesses and faith communities that are so important to the fabric and character of our great state.

I urge you to pass legislation that caps the fixed charge for residential and small business customers. This will assist our most vulnerable residents, support our small businesses, promote green job growth, and reward residents that live in a life-affirming and sustainable manner in accordance with their moral and theological teachings.