

TESTIMONY OF  
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Environment Committee  
February 19, 2016

**RE: H.B. No. 15150 AN ACT CONCERNING TREE WARDENS' NOTICES ON TREES AND SHRUBS PRIOR TO REMOVAL, TREE REMOVAL ALONG STATE HIGHWAYS AND CLEAN-UP BY PUBLIC UTILITY CORPORATIONS FOLLOWING CERTAIN TREE REMOVAL**

Eversource Energy thanks the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on H.B. No. 5150. Eversource is committed to finding ways to support Connecticut's goal of preserving trees, shrubs, and roadside beauty; however, we believe that this bill goes too far and will not provide benefits to our customers or the residents of the State of Connecticut.

Section 2(f) of this bill reiterates the current standard applicable to public utilities, which requires them to apply, in writing, to the town Tree Warden for a permit to cut or remove, in whole or in part, any tree or shrub, or part thereof, which lies within the limits of any public road or grounds. The bill goes on, however, to now require the Tree Warden to "make a posting on each tree, shrub or group of shrubs for which such a permit is sought" and further, to hold a public hearing "if any person, firm or corporation objects to the proposed cutting or removal, in whole or in part."

Following the historic storms of 2011 and 2012, multiple state investigations, PURA dockets, and legislative initiatives, Eversource undertook major system hardening efforts in order to prevent the same type of situation in the future. In 2013, Eversource received approval from the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority ("PURA") for its five-year infrastructure hardening plan, which included a comprehensive plan for vegetation maintenance and enhanced tree trimming over a five-year span. As part of our vegetation management planning, we embarked on a more rigorous program to trim trees every four years, and to remove trees that present a hazard to our distribution and transmission systems. In 2015, Eversource had its best year of service ever. Our customers saw a 50% improvement in reliability and were able to count on reliable power 99.98% of the time, day and night, even in stormy weather. This was due in large part to the increased

efforts of system hardening, especially tree trimming; however, the proposed legislation would prove to impede our ability to trim and remove trees.

Last year, Eversource's Vegetation Management Organization completed trimming on over 4,000 miles of roadways and trimmed and/or removed an estimated 600,000 trees, the majority of which were in or hanging over public roadways. The proposed legislation would require a municipal Tree Warden to post each and every one of those trees before Eversource could proceed with its work. This would, in effect, bring the tree trimming program to a screeching halt, especially considering the vast majority of the 149 towns and cities that we serve have a volunteer or part-time Tree Warden. In fact, a survey conducted by the state in the 1990s estimated that only 20% of the Tree Wardens in the state serve in a full-time capacity.

This section also requires that a Tree Warden conduct a public hearing in the event that "any person, firm or corporation objects to the proposed cutting or removal, in whole or in part." As noted above, few of the 149 towns that we serve have full-time Tree Wardens. To require a volunteer Tree Warden to call and conduct a public hearing every time someone objects to tree trimming will result in undue delays to the tree trimming process, could potentially cause financial hardship to municipalities, and is unnecessary, as there is already a mechanism in place for people who object to utility tree trimming. Public Act 14-151, a comprehensive tree trimming public act adopted just two years ago, set forth this mandate and Eversource has implemented a thorough procedure to address tree trimming objections.

The utilities have the obligation under law to meet the state's energy needs and we do that. As PURA stated in the Final Decision in Docket no. 12-01-10, "Falling trees and branches caused utility outages with significant costs and increased public safety expenses." Eversource is meeting its public obligations through tree trimming and this bill will greatly impede its ability to do in the future.

Thank you.