Senator Hwang Testimony in Support of HB 5507: An Act Concerning State Agency and Court Proceedings Relating to Electric Transmission Lines


This bill would ensure that when utilities are submitting an application to the siting council, they must not only consult the municipal CEO of the city/town the project is located in, but they also must notify the municipality’s legislative body, any affected landowners, as well as the state senator and state representative of the project location as well. It also expands the ability for intervenors in siting council decisions to obtain judicial review of an order issued.

As background, The Connecticut Siting Council (CSC) holds the pivotal role of harmonizing the demand for efficient public utility services, ensuring affordability for consumers, and safeguarding the state's environment. Central to their duties is establishing environmental criteria governing the placement, structure, building, and function of public utility infrastructure, guaranteeing the safety and welfare of Connecticut's residents. Through its decisions, CSC wields significant influence over the welfare of Connecticut citizens and the potential impact on neighboring communities, businesses, and nonprofits.

Notably, the towns of Fairfield and Bridgeport have gone through an arduous process with United Illuminating's (UI) plans to build monopoles throughout their communities. At first, the public and impacted abutting properties were not adequately notified. Residents, churches, nonprofits, and businesses (intervenors) requested facts and information as to whether or not the transmission lines the monopoles were built for could be buried instead. They also sought information on the possibility of the project requiring the taking of private properties through utility easements.

Under the CSC proceedings, UI argued it had fulfilled its mandated requirement on notification and that it would be prohibitively more expensive to bury these power lines but declined to divulge their calculations on the matter. Intervenors tried to get information from UI during the siting council hearing on what information was used to determine the suitability of the project but were unable to.

The siting council recently approved UI's plan of CSC docket #516 (with alterations to the original proposal) without fully understanding the overreaching easements over private and town property that would be required for this project, and what environmental effects would result from them. In fact, the changed plan affected properties that are now unable to seek intervenor status. Due process was denied, and these answers must be readily available to members of the public directly affected by projects. Intervenors deserve to know what information is used in important determinations. Through this bill, elected officials will be brought into the process, and will be able to relay information to their constituents.

Intervenors in this matter deserve the same rights to obtain and present facts as the utilities. In the Fairfield & Bridgeport case, intervenors were not given the same amount of time and fact-finding due process to plead their case before the council as the utilities. Intervenors deserve the right to obtain judicial review of applications. This bill would afford them the right to get a second opinion as to whether all information was properly considered.

I thank the Judiciary Committee for taking up this important legislation and look forward to working with my colleagues to make the siting council process work better for all parties involved.

With Gratitude and Respect,

Tony Hwang
State Senator, 28th District