



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Rob Rolison

Senator Rob Rolison's Testimony to the Public Service Commission on the Proposed Rate Hike

ROB ROLISON | October 17, 2023

| ISSUE: **UTILITY BILLS**

Good evening. My name is Rob Rolison, and I represent the 39th District in our state Senate. I'd like to begin by thanking the Public Service Commission for holding at least two public-statement hearings in our district. As you know, this allows citizens and community stakeholders in Newburgh and elsewhere to voice their legitimate concerns about this proposed rate increase.

Public input such as the comments offered today will be critical in determining the reasonableness of the proposed hike. Thank you also to Judges Costello and Moreno for listening to the statement our office submitted into the record on September 20, and for dispassionately presiding over this important matter of public policy.

Our Hudson Valley region faces an affordability crisis. Costs associated with housing, childcare, groceries, and energy have all increased. According to a recent Siena Research Institute poll, more than 80% of New York's voters consider the rising cost of living to be a major problem. My constituents shouldn't have to choose between a doctor's visit and feeding a family of four, between lighting and heating their home and filling up the gas tank to get to work. Yet that is precisely what a rate increase of this magnitude would mean for the average Newburgh resident.

After carefully listening to our constituents here in the 39th District, I believe Central Hudson's proposed rate increases of 16 percent on the average residential electric bill and 19 percent on the average natural gas bill is unacceptable. Let me repeat: unacceptable. This rate hike would be too much, too fast for Newburgh, for Poughkeepsie, for Beacon -- for us all. Therefore, I respectfully request that the Commission reject the proposed increase amount.

In my view, stakeholders working with local partners can craft a better solution which meets the needs of our region's and state's growing energy demands while protecting ratepayers who are already squeezed by inflation and higher costs nearly everywhere else. To that end I have spoken with Central Hudson's leadership on several occasions to express my concerns and work collaboratively toward a better outcome. I have also visited and spoken to NYISO, the Albany-area nonprofit responsible for operating our state's electric grid to learn more about what's keeping the lights on, so to speak.

Both have relayed their concerns that the structural pressures being placed on energy supply thanks to the rushed Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act would lead to higher costs for homeowners and renters living here. I've met with a local small business selling natural-gas-powered fireplaces that risks loss of its current product line and related jobs thanks to Albany's ill-considered natural-gas ban. You cannot manage what you can't measure. I do not believe those in charge of New York's energy policy have reckoned with the dramatic immediate costs associated with its long-term promises. It's time to pause and reassess the consequences responsibly, before we leave the people of Newburgh and the rest of the Hudson Valley behind.

One suggestion I will offer today to ease the burden of rising energy costs on families and individuals is to expand the PSC's Energy Affordability Program, or EAP, financial relief to more New Yorkers. As you know, the EAP is currently pegged to Federal Poverty Level

thresholds and provides a monthly discount on utility bills.

My district office has completed or engaged over 100 cases of utility-billing assistance since I entered the state Senate in January. The majority of this casework involves middle-income and working-class New Yorkers unable to pay their electricity and heating bills. I can assure you from having spoken personally to some of these folks: their stories will break your heart.

Therefore, I am calling on the PSC to streamline the enrollment process and make these discounts available to more of our residents in Newburgh and elsewhere who are struggling with month-to-month payments. Albany can, and should, do better.

In closing, let me say that it is not too late to hit pause on this massive rate increase. I believe there is still time to take into account the important first-person testimony being delivered here today. Lead by listening; don't double down on a mistake. The decision is yours. Thank you.