



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jen Metzger

## Senator Metzger Questions PSC Chairman, Utility CEOs on Emergency Preparedness and Response Failures in Wake of Widespread Outages

JEN METZGER August 22, 2020

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**Hudson Valley and Catskills, NY...**The State Legislature on Thursday held a joint hearing to investigate prolonged power outages caused by Tropical Storm Isaias, and issues with utility preparedness and response efforts. Senator Jen Metzger (SD-42), a member of the Senate Energy & Telecommunications, Environmental Conservation, and Local Government Committees, questioned NYS Public Service Chairman John Rhodes and utility executives

from Central Hudson, New York State Electric & Gas Corporation (NYSEG), and Orange and Rockland Utilities, Inc. (O&R).

Public Utility Law Project (PULP), Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA Local 1-2), and the NYS Department of Public Service Office of Resilience and Emergency Preparedness also provided testimony, along with utility companies serving other parts of the state.

Senator Metzger told Chairman Rhodes that she was concerned that utilities were "top heavy" and were not investing in the needed linemen and women, and urged the Public Service Commission to undertake a statewide assessment of boots-on-the-ground staffing needs that takes into account the impacts of climate change on the severity and frequency of storms, as well as local infrastructure and outage risks. Rhodes responded that he would consider such a study.

Senator Metzger also shared her frustration with O&R President and CEO Robert Sanchez about his company's storm preparedness and restoration efforts: "Many of my constituents in Orange and Sullivan counties suffered unacceptably prolonged delays in restoration of power, and while O&R's website said the utility was working 24/7 to restore service, their own linemen and women have said that this is not true. Imagine an elderly resident, living alone, with no electricity and no water. Or imagine the stress that a daughter feels worrying about the insulin supply for her diabetic father and whether it would perish in days without power. These were the experiences of my constituents—experiences we cannot repeat," said Metzger.

Prior to becoming a State Senator, Metzger served as Director of the non-profit Citizens for Local Power, and spent years advocating for residents and small businesses in utility rate case proceedings of the Public Service Commission (PSC). She has long been a vocal

proponent of hardening utility infrastructure and improving vegetation management. The vast majority of power outages are caused by downed trees and limbs.

In the case of Sullivan County, antiquated distribution infrastructure has been responsible for frequent power outages year round—as many as 300 a year, according to local elected officials in the Town of Highland—and Senator Metzger urged NYSEG President Carl Taylor to prioritize replacement of aging circuits in that county immediately.

Other issues addressed at the hearing included the pre-storm steps taken to protect the electric distribution grid and telecommunications infrastructure; undergrounding of distribution lines; pre-storm preparations; coordination between utility and telecommunication providers and municipalities in restoring service; the reasons for the loss of customer service communication during and after the storm, among other issues. The full archived hearing can be viewed [here](#).

*Jen Metzger represents the 42nd Senate District, which includes all of Sullivan County and parts of Delaware, Orange, and Ulster Counties. Senator Metzger serves as Chair of the Agriculture Committee and sits on the Environmental Conservation, Education, Health, Energy and Telecommunications, Local Government, Women's Issues, Domestic Animal Welfare, and Legislative Commission on Rural Resources Committees.*

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