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February 11, 2013

Regina Calcaterra, Executive Director  
Moreland Commission on Utility Storm Preparedness and Response  
New York State Capitol  
Albany, NY 12227

Dear Ms. Calcaterra,

Thank you for this opportunity to submit comments with regard to the preparedness and response of utility companies to Hurricane Sandy. My district is wholly contained within Westchester County and many fellow elected officials and constituents whom I represent share my concerns with the response of Con Edison in the County. Since the storm, I have received countless phone calls, letters, emails and direct comments from the people I represent outlining their specific issues surrounding the utility company's storm response. Based on this feedback and on my direct experience touring impacted areas and serving my constituents in the aftermath of the storm, two specific issues struck me as critically important: the lack of communication between the utility, its customers, elected officials and internally between employees, and the need for the company to rethink its priorities with regard to vulnerable populations (such as senior citizens and the disabled), residents of Westchester and its smaller villages and towns.

At the outset of the recovery, it was clear that external and internal communication was lacking with Con Edison. Externally, the company struggled to effectively convey reliable and detailed information to government officials and customers in the days following the storm. In the beginning of the recovery, many government leaders felt they were kept in the dark about how many Con Edison crews were working within their municipality and where they were working. This prevented efficient and timely planning and execution of clean-up efforts, such as tree and debris removal, and other necessary post-storm recovery work. Communication improved only after I joined several of my colleagues to insist on daily conference calls between utility executives and elected officials.

Constituents also complained of a lack of reliable information. Many noted that the Con Edison website frequently displayed incorrect information about their homes. Locations that were powerless were listed as restored even after the homeowner had reported the outage. Many

of these customers repeatedly called the company back to make sure they had the proper information, often enduring wait times of over an hour.

Internally, it seemed that Con Edison employees were not effectively communicating with each other. On more than one occasion, it was clear that engineers in the field were not relaying information back to Con Edison executives. One explanation given was that it is difficult to relay technical information from the field in laymen terms. But it also seemed that many engineers were not given clear and coherent instructions from their superiors. I received several reports from constituents claiming that Con Edison workers were parked in their neighborhood for hours awaiting orders, and on many occasions, they were not guarding downed live wires.

One incident occurred a few days after the storm which speaks to the issue of internal communication. I had asked a Con Edison executive on the conference call to send a representative to a large business district in Greenburgh. The next day, I personally visited the site and was pleased to see a Con Edison rep there when I arrived. I was further pleased to learn that power was restored to the location the subsequent weekend. But on the next Monday's conference call, another elected official brought the same issue up with the same executive -- who was unaware of the action that had been taken. I explained to the executive that I previously mentioned this location on a conference call and the situation had been resolved. Only then did the executive know the updated information. This small example speaks the bigger issue of a lack of internal communication within Con Edison.

The need for Con Edison to alter its priorities in the aftermath of the storm was also clear. Specifically, it seemed that some of Westchester's most vulnerable populations should have received greater attention. While I was pleased that nursing homes and schools received priority attention from the utility company, I was concerned that assisted living facilities and housing for senior citizens and the disabled did not receive similar treatment. The hardship of living without heat and electricity significantly impacts these populations and it is critical to quickly address their needs in an emergency situation. Assisted living facilities and buildings that house senior citizens and the disabled should be placed on a more comprehensive priority list.

Additionally, Con Edison tended to prioritize work to large multifamily homes, buildings and other locations that would impact the most number of people at once. We were repeatedly told on conference calls that so-called "onesies" and "twosies" were not the highest priorities at the outset of the recovery. While the goal of this policy was understandable, in many cases it seemed to relegate entire neighborhoods and villages, predominantly comprised of one and two family homes, to the bottom of the list. This left thousands of small-village residents in the dark for weeks. In essence, Con Edison failed to see the forest for the trees with this policy. Many towns and villages in Westchester are mostly made up of one and two family homes, so a village of a thousand "onesies" and "twosies" impacts a huge number of people. People in Westchester also generally felt that Con Edison's initial focus was on restoring power to their customers in New York City. Con Edison must rethink their priorities so Westchester residents, especially those in smaller towns and villages, are not at the bottom of the list should a major storm create a similar situation in the future.

Hurricane Sandy was an extraordinary event, and we are all cognizant of the magnitude of the damage and the significant pressure that Con Edison faced at the time. However, given the recent abundance of extraordinary weather over the last few years, it seems more and more likely that such an event will happen again. That is why it is so important for this commission to meticulously investigate what went wrong, what went right and how we can do better next time.

I believe communication is one of the key components of a successful recovery. It allows municipalities to plan and execute a timely and efficient clean up, it allows families to assess their situation and make plans for alternate housing, food medicine or other necessities and it keeps the community informed. Keeping people in the dark, in more than one way, is not acceptable and Con Edison must do a better job the next time. Moreover, our most vulnerable populations must receive priority attention in the same manner as nursing homes and schools. Con Edison must also devise a policy that does not unfairly relegate residents of Westchester and it's smaller villages and towns to the bottom of the list for power restoration.

I thank you for undertaking this task and look forward to your final report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrea Stewart-Cousins". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Andrea Stewart-Cousins  
Democratic Conference Leader  
Senator, 35<sup>th</sup> District