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February 16, 2022

Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Rory M. Christian, Chair
New York State Public Service Commission
Agency Building 3
Empire State Plaza
Albany, NY 12223

Re: Utility Price Increases

Dear Governor Hochul and Chair Christian:

As the temperatures have dropped across the State, many New Yorkers have seen their utility bills skyrocket far more than usual, even for this time of year. As you can imagine, I have heard from countless residents I serve who are frustrated by rapidly rising costs, lack of alternatives and lack of action by state or federal governments to provide meaningful relief. Far too many New Yorkers have still not fully recovered financially from the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent State shutdowns, and these exorbitant rates for such a fundamental necessity is leaving many struggling families—especially our seniors on fixed incomes—unsure of how they will be able to afford to make ends meet. Respectfully, I urge you to take any immediate action available to you to suspend taxes and fees related to utility and energy costs to help New Yorkers afford their bills now, and to work with the State Legislature to address these costs long term. Furthermore, I ask that the Public Service Commission (PSC) exercise their authority to investigate these recent price increases.

Central Hudson, which provides utility services to many of my constituents in Dutchess and Putnam counties, recently issued an alert regarding increased energy costs. According to Central Hudson, they projected that natural gas bills would increase 19%, electric bills by 46%, and combination electric and natural gas bills by 29%. Customers of New York State Electric and Gas Corporation (NYSEG), another major utility in my district, have similarly seen significant increases in their utility bills. In addition, consumers of Con Edison, which serves New York City, have reported price spikes as high as 300%. As you know, all utilities contend

that they are at the mercy of surges in market prices and point to factors such as increased demand for electricity and natural gas, international volatility and other issues they claim are beyond their control. As you also know, decisions at the State level, like ones that have significantly reduced energy supply, failure to invest in bolstering the power grid, and others that make it difficult and expensive to do business in New York have further exasperated these price increases.

While some price drivers may certainly be beyond the control of utility companies and State officials, many can be traced to New York's high costs in general—much of that resulting from significant taxes and fees tacked on to utility bills. It is not enough to simply point fingers at the federal government, when New York's own tax and fee structure is adding insult to injury.

After nearly two years of significant financial strain brought on by the pandemic and lockdowns, combined with inflation reaching its highest level in 40 years, making basic necessities more affordable for New Yorkers needs to be a top priority for all public officials. As such, immediate action to suspend utility and energy taxes and fees to put more money directly into the pockets of hardworking New Yorkers is necessary to ensure residents can afford to support themselves and their families during this harsh winter season. I urge you to do right by our residents and use your authority to make a real financial difference in the lives of New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to working with you on this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Serino".

Senator Sue Serino
41st District