

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

**TESTIMONY OF
U.S. SENATOR RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
BEFORE THE
ENERGY AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 4, 2025**

Please accept the following as testimony regarding: Senate Bill 1193, An Act Concerning the Composition of the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority and Senate Bill 1194, An Act Concerning the Regulation of Public Utilities. These proposals address issues surrounding the constitution of the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) and its decision-making process.

As former Attorney General and now as United States Senator, I have strongly advocated for lower electricity rates – electricity is an expense that hits struggling lower-and middle-income families the hardest. I continue to advocate at the federal level for reforms to reduce the federally directed transmission line cost on the consumer’s bill. Electricity is a necessity. It needs to be made affordable in Connecticut.

I commend and thank Governor Lamont, along with PURA and the PURA chair, Marissa Gillett, for their efforts to protect Connecticut’s families from the increasing impact of higher electricity costs.

Eversource and Avangrid’s continual harassment and intimidation of PURA for its approval of lower than requested electricity rate hikes – while still approving rates that ensure a significant return for these companies – actually underscores the propriety of the agency’s actions. PURA is balancing the interests of the public utilities and the Connecticut consumer.

The for-profit companies’ lawsuit against PURA and its chair is quite frankly frivolous – laughable if it did not reflect a serious effort to threaten and intimidate. The lawsuit attempts to undermine PURA’s regulatory decisions in favor of ratepayers – and personally attacks Chair Gillett as she undergoes re-confirmation in the General Assembly – by attempting to hyperbolically elevate picayune complaints about routine docket-management and other procedural decisions into allegations of impropriety and illegality.

In truth, the utilities have made their real complaint clear: PURA is finally standing up for consumers and declining to approve all their requested rate hikes. The utilities claim that PURA is more an advocate for consumers than a ‘fair’ arbiter of a rate request. PURA, by its very nature, must balance the competing interests of Connecticut families and the utilities’ Wall Street investors. PURA’s recent decisions have appropriately balanced these concerns, while standing up for consumers.

Ratepayer should be angry about the companies’ attempt to bully public servants for protecting consumers by pushing back on their monopoly power.

As the Energy and Technology Committee reviews potential corrective legislation, the committee should review whether Connecticut families are being best served by these so-called public utilities that seem to only care about their investors and bondholders. And their expressed plan to invest more in Massachusetts and reduce investment in Connecticut shows a punitive anti-consumer intent and may violate their non-negotiable statutory and franchise obligations to maintain a safe and reliable grid. Connecticut should investigate whether the utilities are meeting their obligations, or whether franchise revocation or other remedies are in order. Longer term it should explore the potential benefits of replacing these utilities with a truly publicly owned model as we currently have in the municipally-owned electric utilities in Norwich, Wallingford, and other towns and our water utilities like the Regional Water Authority, which will be acquiring the former Aquarion water company.

Thank you.