

Good afternoon. 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 this initial series of public-statement hearings. Public input such as the comments offered today will be critical in determining the reasonableness of this proposed rate hike. Thank you also to Judges Costello and Moreno for hearing my testimony and dispassionately presiding over this important matter of public policy.

My district in the Hudson Valley faces an affordability crisis. Costs associated with housing, childcare, groceries, and energy have all increased. According to the latest 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.

Central Hudson's proposed rate increases of 16 percent on the average residential electric bill and 19 percent on the average natural gas bill to take effect in summer of 2024 is unacceptable. I believe that this rate hike would be too much, too fast for our Hudson Valley homeowners and residents. Therefore, I respectfully request that the Commission reject the proposed increase amount.

It is my opinion that 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 with and spoken to NYISO ("nigh-SO"), the Albany-area nonprofit responsible for operating our state's electric grid.

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 on our state's middle class. 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 responsibly assess the consequences, before we leave our state's middle class 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 (EAP) financial relief to more New Yorkers. As you know, the EAP is currently pegged to FPL 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 New Yorkers unable to pay their electricity and heating bills. I am calling on the PSC to streamline the enrollment process and make these discounts available to more of our middle-class residents who are struggling with month-to-month payments.

In closing let me say that I am relieved that the Commission has heeded our call to provide in-person public-comment hearings to everyday New Yorkers concerned about higher energy prices. I look forward to joining them as we continue this critical conversation. Thank you.