

Name

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Your Comment

My name is Amber Ruther and I'm with the public power NY coalition. I'm here to testify in favor of option 4 to fully municipalize LI's energy system.

I have always struggled to understand why any utility in this country is private. The only real answer to that question is so that wealthy shareholders can continue to profit from an essential service and leech wealth from the working class.

Utilities are a natural monopoly. There is no competition and no choice for consumers. You cannot build 2 separate distribution systems to compete with each other to provide better service. It's also an essential service with very inelastic demand. People can die without power. We've seen what happens in places like Texas where energy is treated as a commodity to profit from instead of as a human right that should be guaranteed to all, like water.

There is absolutely no reason to continue this failed public-private partnership. Why should we pay millions more to allow a private company to profit from terrible service when a public entity could put people over profits?

We know public ownership in and of itself is not a panacea. We also need robust democratic governance mechanisms to ensure that the interests of workers, ratepayers, reliability, and the environment are balanced. That's why I also support the proposal to add an Observatory and elected board to LIPA that Michael Menser mentioned that would foster public engagement. People are tired of spending hours at sham public hearings where they have no real voice or influence. We need a utility that is truly accountable to the people it serves.

PSEG keeps asking for a second chance, claiming that their response to Isaias was a mistake and it won't happen again. But we know it's not a one-time incident, and it will inevitably happen again. That's because putting profits over people is a feature, not a bug, of all investor-owned utilities. Replacing PSEG with another private utility that has the same perverse incentives would not make anything better, and could even make it worse, especially as climate change makes disasters like storms and heat waves more common. I say this as a customer of Con Edison and National Grid, who have all of the

same problems with poor disaster response, refusing to invest in grid resiliency, and high rates that PSEG does.

For example, during Sandy, the grid was already weakened because Con Ed had locked out its workers during contract negotiations in 2012, relying on scabs to do emergency repairs only instead of maintenance. They had been using \$1.8 million of our ratepayer dollars for a strike contingency fund so that they could union bust. In restoring service during Sandy, they resorted to patchwork and temporary repairs that they couldn't later revisit due to poor documentation. We need a utility that invests in a well paid, fully staffed workforce, and doesn't rely on mutual aid workers and scabs in an emergency.

Then, during a heat wave in 2019, there was a massive blackout affecting tens of thousands of customers across NYC. It was dangerously hot, and people were trapped in high-rise apartments without working elevators and in stuffy subways stuck on the tracks. Con Ed intentionally cut off power in communities of color to preserve power in wealthier areas. They failed to provide any support to medically vulnerable customers who relied on life saving medical equipment, instead calling the police on them for "wellness checks." They lied about their preparedness, estimated times of restoration, and just about everything else. We later found out that the blackout was caused by a failure of a relay protection system they had been given \$350 million to fix in a prior rate case, but they never performed the upgrade, and no one knows what they did with the \$350 million. There is almost no accountability to ensure that utilities spend our money on what they say they will and on what consumers want and need. I have dozens more stories like this, but just trust me, as a Con Ed customer, you do not want to switch to Con Ed.

I have intervened in utility rate cases and I have seen time and time again that all private utilities are incentivized to build infrastructure we don't even need instead of investing in maintenance. They have every incentive to fix absolutely nothing until it breaks or explodes. UWUA said Con Ed's policy is to run it until it fails.

When preventable accidents happen and people get killed, the Public Service Commission may give them a slap on the wrist. But when Con Ed killed a mother in an explosion in Queens in 2009, the PSC insisted that they could not fine them because it would lower the rate of return for investors, and make the utility unable to raise the capital it needs to function. This illustrates that there is no real way to hold private utilities accountable. They should be publicly funded and democratically controlled.

The definition of insanity is trying the same thing again and again and expecting different results. Thankfully, we don't need to try all of these 4 options to determine which would be best. We've seen public-private partnerships fail spectacularly, and public utilities thrive all across the country. We have over 2,000 public utilities in the country already. That means we have plenty of data to look at that shows that on average, public utilities are twice as reliable and 13% less expensive than private ones.

Democratically controlled public utilities have also been able to transition to renewables much more quickly, affordably, and smoothly than private ones have.

LIPA's own Adoptions Analysis states that municipalization would result in: "Savings of \$65 to \$75 million per year compared to PSEG LI contract." Municipalization should be a no-brainer.

We hope that you will stand with the public and on the right side of history and fully municipalize Long Island's power system.