

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE
and the
ASSEMBLY WAYS AND MEANS
COMMITTEE

Testimony of New York State Department of Public Service

February 1, 2022

Good morning, Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, and other distinguished legislative members. My name is Rory Christian, and I am Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Public Service (Department) and Chair of the Public Service Commission (Commission).

The Commission's regulatory jurisdiction extends over New York's investor-owned utilities, including six major electric/gas utilities, five major gas-only utilities, and two major water companies. We have jurisdiction over small telephone companies, hundreds of small water companies, nearly 40 municipal utilities, cable companies, power generators and energy service companies. The Department — the administrative arm of the Commission — also provides regulatory oversight of electric utility operations on Long Island.

In State Fiscal Year 22-23, we are prepared to take the next steps to implement the nation-leading Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), passed by the Legislature in 2019. As the Climate Action Council completes its work on the scoping plan on the schedule required by the CLCPA, Governor Hochul is moving in parallel to accelerate some key actions we agree are necessary to meet the CLCPA's ambitious emissions reduction goals. For example, Governor Hochul has proposed to change the building code to eliminate fossil fuel use in new construction by 2027 and has proposed changes to the Public Service Law that conform to the CLCPA, including eliminating the requirement for natural gas utilities to cover the costs for the first 100 feet of supply line between a natural gas main and the end user. Governor Hochul also has set a target to electrify, or make electrification-ready, 2 million buildings by 2030, and the Governor is driving investments needed to accommodate 850,000 zero-emission vehicles on New York roads by the end of 2025.

We will take complimentary actions at the Commission, while also meeting our statutory mandate to keep all utility systems safe and reliable. We will continue to review rate cases through the lens of the CLCPA, so that we keep making progress in achieving the clean energy objectives without disproportionately burdening disadvantaged communities. We will evolve our policy proceedings to more comprehensively address the CLCPA requirements. And we will continue to support the electrification of transportation, through the successful rollout of the groundbreaking electric vehicle infrastructure program known as EV Make-Ready, which will deploy more than

50,000 new public and commercial Level 2 charging ports across the state by 2025. This year we will also commence a proceeding to provide operating cost relief mechanisms for fast charging infrastructure. I thank Assemblyman Cusick and Senator Kennedy for advancing the underlying legislation.

Energy affordability remains a key priority, especially as we recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department is working with the utilities and our state agency partners to increase awareness of existing consumer protections and utility bill payment assistance programs to minimize service disconnections. The Commission has made significant improvements to the low-income energy bill discount programs administered by the major electric and gas utilities, most notably by adding \$129 million to the program last year. We now dedicate more than \$365 million per year to assist low-income families with their utility bills.

This year we will also move forward with implementing new initiatives advanced by the Legislature which are designed to improve utility services and accountability. These new initiatives include:

- requiring utilities to publicly report executive compensation;
- implementing the new law to crackdown on robocalls;
- analyzing the feasibility of relocating underground all or most of the existing, above-ground utility lines;
- initiating a proceeding that would address proposals made by electric utilities to undertake projects and programs related to storm hardening and resiliency; and
- making it easier and more affordable for broadband providers to install internet service on utility poles.

We will also complete our broadband mapping initiative on time in the second quarter. The mapping will support Governor Hochul's ConnectALL initiative, which, at \$1 billion, will be the largest-ever investment in New York's digital infrastructure.

In addition to making it easier for internet providers to use utility poles and completing our broadband mapping initiative — which will be used to pinpoint where broadband investments need to be made — we are leading the effort to ensure every eligible New Yorker can take advantage

of the federal government’s \$14 billion Affordability Program that supports an up to \$30 per month broadband subsidy for low-income households. We greatly appreciate the partnership with many of your offices in consumer outreach on these issues, including helping to distribute our consumer survey for the broadband map and informing your constituents about the availability of the low-income broadband discount.

To accomplish the many new and important tasks before us, the Executive Budget proposes to increase our staff by 37 full time employees — the largest increase in eight years — to our existing workforce of 491 full-time employees. New personnel will focus on priority areas, including CLCPA policy development, resilience, utility oversight, and enforcement. These employees will enhance the work of advancing clean energy, driving statewide economic growth, and creating jobs in New York State. Further, through positions like a resident inspector at the Indian Point decommissioning site, these employees will help ensure the safety and reliability of our regulated utility systems.

In sum, we are well-positioned to deliver our core mission and meet the Governor’s ambitious agenda and we are grateful for the Legislature’s support. This concludes my remarks. I welcome your questions.