

ULSTER COUNTY EXECUTIVE
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PATRICK K. RYAN
County Executive



March 3, 2022

Rory M. Christian, Chair
New York State Public Service Commission
3 Empire State Plaza
Agency Building 3
Albany, NY 122563-1350

RE: Request for investigation into Central Hudson Gas & Electric's billing practices and "bill surges"

Dear Chair Christian:

I am writing to you today on behalf of the 181,000 residents of Ulster County who receive their gas and electric utilities from Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation (Central Hudson or Company). For the reasons outlined below, I request from you as the Chair of New York's Public Service Commission (Commission) and Chief Executive Officer for the Department of Public Service (DPS) to initiate an investigation into certain actions and potential inaction by Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation to determine whether the Company is conducting its business fairly, properly, and consistent with all applicable sections of New York State's Public Service Law (PSL) and Rules, including but not limited to PSL Section 71.

Over the course of the past six months, both our office and the office of our Ulster County Human Rights Commissioner have fielded an unprecedented volume of serious complaints from constituents expressing concerns about unreliable billing practices and mounting, untenable costs for their utilities. We have also heard from both Senator Michelle Hinchey and Assemblymember Kevin Cahill, each of whom have also been inundated by residents struggling to decipher the information being provided, or in many cases not being provided, by the company. Residents have detailed a multitude of negative experiences including not being billed for multiple months, erroneous and/or extremely over-estimated bills, automatic withdrawals of large sums without notice, unsubstantiated charges, and more.

Further, the primary explanations provided by Central Hudson have been rising global energy costs and an inept implementation of their new billing and customer service system, whilst

disregarding the precarious and stressful situations they have plunged their customers into. The failed implementation of their new billing system compounded by unexpected and unprecedented bill surges has resulted in extensive damage to the confidence of our community as consumers, all of whom are without any other choice of provider for their utility needs. As noted above, I respectfully request on my constituents' behalf that the Commission initiate an investigation into Central Hudson Gas & Electric Corporation. Such investigation should include, but not be limited to, a thorough examination of their billing systems, issues related to replacement of their IT systems, and the company's overall effort to communicate with its customers prior to bill surges and during these ongoing billing issues. Further, such investigation should examine the applicability of Section 73 of the Public Service Law for compensation to the ratepayers that suffered extended outages during Winter Storm Landon and were subsequently hit with bills up to 46% higher than normal immediately following being without service and many being forced to expend their funds on emergency housing during the storm.

Finally, this request in conjunction with the additional calls from State leadership, signify that the public interest in this situation lies in the Commission and DPS using its fullest powers pursuant to Sections 65 and 71 of the PSL and other applicable sections, so that our community will have assurance that Central Hudson will be held to the highest standard of service as should be required of utility providers in the State of New York.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Patrick K. Ryan
County Executive