

Testimony of Mayor Noam Bramson
NYS Public Service Commission
April 23, 2018

Good afternoon. I am Noam Bramson, the Mayor of New Rochelle, the seventh largest city in New York State, with 80,000 residents, all of whom are served by Con Edison, and many of whom were impacted by Winter Storms Riley and Quinn.

You are receiving a great deal of input from both municipal officials and the general public, so I will try to keep my own comments concise and focused entirely on specific suggestions for improvement.

First, a complete overhaul is required for the systems through which Con Ed – and perhaps other utilities – determine and disseminate Estimated Times of Renewal. Initial ETRs for Winter Storms Riley and Quinn were entirely unrealistic and were recognized as such by almost anyone with prior experience in such mass outage events. Thousands of customers planned around these overly optimistic ETRs and found their hardships compounded when estimates were inevitably pushed back. We are told that software problems were responsible for these failures, but such system deficiencies could and should have been caught prior to the emergency with a more rigorous process of stress-testing.

Second, utilities should provide municipalities with real-time information about restoration activities within their borders. In contrast to the municipal-utility coordination on clear & cut work, which was reasonably good, municipal officials were often flying blind with respect to restoration. As a consequence, we were unable to answer questions from the public, unable to sequence associated DPW activities, and unable to assess the reasonableness of utility resource allocation. Providing real-time information will likely require changes in utility information systems to enhance their transparency and to simplify data sharing and display.

Third, post-restoration robo-calls should be re-phrased to more accurately reflect their true intent and to guard against false expectations. In the most recent storms, thousands of residents received robo-calls informing them that their power had been restored, and in all too many cases, this was simply inaccurate. I know of many people who travelled long distances, children in tow, only to arrive at a cold, dark home. The calls should instead state that crews have been at work in the

neighborhood, and that the utility is trying to determine *whether* power has been restored. This simple change in phraseology would reduce frustration and anger.

Fourth, a universal tagging system should be established for wires on the ground, enabling municipal crews to know whether lines are live or dead, and whether they carry electricity or communication services. We had public crews working in locations where wires were hot despite field assurances to the contrary. In other instances, cable and telephone wires were misidentified as live electrical wires. A universally-employed tagging system would enhance safety, reduce confusion, and enable municipal crews to clear obstructions more efficiently.

Lastly, utilities should evaluate their emergency preparedness teams to determine whether they have sufficient authority and whether they are properly resourced. Emergency events should be fully war-gamed between incidents, with a constant eye toward the evaluation and improvement of systems. Beyond ongoing planning functions, emergency teams should be granted meaningful operational authority during emergency events. Unlike a large standing army of field crews – which would be desirable, but prohibitively expensive – maintaining a robust crisis leadership team with adequate authority and resources is a realistic objective that would greatly improve the planning and execution of emergency activities.

The foregoing is not a comprehensive list, but I am confident that other topics will be covered extensively in comments and submissions from colleagues. Officials across municipal boundaries have worked closely together during and after the most recent crisis and, in almost every instance, we share a common perspective on what went right, what went wrong, and what needs to change, so I will simply associate myself with and support the suggestions offered by other mayors and supervisors.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts. I hope and expect that the PSC will apply its full authority to ensuring that the next weather event is addressed in a more effective and responsive fashion.