

## Massaro, Luly (PUC)

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**From:** George Wiley Center <georgewileycenterri@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, October 6, 2020 9:59 AM  
**To:** Massaro, Luly (PUC)  
**Cc:** George Wiley; Camilo Viveiros  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] : Public Comments for Distribution Rate Adjustment

Dear Public Utilities Commission:

We are Rhode Island community organizations and community members who are greatly concerned with your recent vote to approve National Grid's electric rate increase of over 10%. We are asking that you immediately reverse your votes on this increase, and additionally, that you vote against National Grid's new proposal for a distribution adjustment charge, which would further increase annual utility costs to residents.

We are in a global pandemic alongside high levels of unemployment and economic insecurity. Now more than ever, we need affordable utilities, not rate hikes.

National Grid is essentially the utility monopoly of our state and as it stands, they have billions of dollars in assets. They can afford to cover 'pass-through costs' as opposed to placing the burden on the customer.

Despite being in a pandemic with low levels of economic opportunity, the average resident's utility bill will now increase by nearly 10% each month. In addition, if the distribution adjustment charge is passed, Rhode Island energy consumers will see their bills increase another 4% each month, for a total of a 14% increase in costs.

This has already been a stressful year as working people have been laid off, they are concerned for their health, and some have even lost loved ones. It is not right that Rhode Island residents may be forced to experience another rate hike. We respectfully ask that the PUC reverse the vote to approve National Grid's electric rate increase and vote against National Grid's new proposal for a distribution adjustment charge.

Sincerely,  
Camilo Viveiros, George Wiley Center

**Tenant Network:** It's a crime to raise rates on working class people during a pandemic and mass unemployment

**RI Childhood Lead Action Project:** Rhode Islanders are already struggling to pay their bills during this crisis, and many owe months of back rent and utility bills. Raising rates right now will just make an economic crisis come down harder on those already most affected in our state. This is inhumane.

### **RI Transit Riders**

**Patricia Raub.** I live in Providence and I am the Coordinator of RI Transit Riders. On behalf of my organization I am writing to urge the Public Utilities Commission to reverse its decision on the rate increase and reject National Grid's request for an additional increase.

Many of the public transit riders for whom we advocate are the essential workers upon whom we all depend. They are already anxious about exposing themselves to Covid infection just getting to work. Let's not make their lives even more difficult by increasing their living expenses. Many others have lost their jobs altogether and are in no position to cope with an increase in their energy bills.

RI Transit Riders urges you to reverse this rate increase and reject the proposed distribution charge.

We oppose this request by National Grid for ratepayers to pay an additional 4% rate distribution charge.

No public utility should be granted this cost-free way of passing along to us ratepayers the cost of their charging us more in the first place. Especially in these days of acute economic hardship, National Grid too ought to tighten its own belt.

### **Roots2Empower Farm**

**Dana Heng, Cranston:** It is already hard enough to keep up with utility bills because National Grid is NOT cheap and it's the only option I have to power my home at 1262 Westminster St, Providence, RI. It is unethical to increase the rate for electricity so drastically during a time where so many people are unemployed or are struggling to make ends meet. Also— WINTER IS COMING! This is the absolute worst time to turn out the lights for Rhode Islanders. I say "turn out" because I

am certain most households will not be able to afford to pay their bills on time with this increase. I teach high school students in an after school program, and during a pandemic it is crucial for them to have proper electricity and wifi so that they can participate in their own education over video conference. It is hard enough to get a computer AND internet access, and increasing the electricity rate would harshly impact my most vulnerable students! It is unfair and immoral. Low income families are struggling to pay for heat as well, which, even with federal assistance there is always a looming debt. I see this on my grandmother's National Grid bills every month. Please do not approve of this rate hike. I am not exaggerating when I say people's lives are at stake. Reverse it now.

**Laurel Leake:** Rate hikes punish the most vulnerable during this deadly pandemic, to boost a corporation's profit margins. This will lead to folks going without enough food or other necessities to cover the new costs, utilities being shut off, and poor families being punished by CPS for trying to raise their kids in these dire conditions. Your recent vote approving National Grid raising rates now, of all times, in no way helps the public the PUC is meant to serve. Please do the right thing and immediately reverse this vote.

#### **Michellet Brand**

**Jordan Goyette:** To do this in the middle of a pandemic should be criminal, because it is. It's frankly amazing that in the middle of an economic crisis, the PUC really thinks it is okay to put more weight on top of working families

**Sam Radov:** I think it's important that utilities take this time to do more to help Rhode Island residents by cutting costs and not increasing them. With record numbers of evictions and unemployment rates across this state it's only going hurt Rhode Islanders more by increasing the cost of living like this. This is especially cruel that this is proposed just before winter. Furthermore, I think we need to be making utilities in this state publicly owned to prevent issues like this from coming up again. Heat, hot water, electricity, telephone and WiFi all should be considered human rights and not commodities to profit off of.

**Kelsey Rilo:** the level of irresponsibility it takes to propose a rate hike in the wake of a pandemic and depression is astounding. people are getting evicted, are sick, are barely making ends meet. preying on the community like this is unforgivable.

**Kate Schapira:** Winter is coming. We all need to turn on the lights earlier to get things done, and in some homes the heat as well, to keep healthy. Many children are trying to learn at home and some parents are trying to work from home, meaning their computers need to be on. COVID-19 has imposed medical and funeral expenses on families, made some people too sick to work and closed down the employment of others, thus placing people at risk of losing their homes. Raising electric rates at this time means increasing Rhode Islanders' risk factor for homelessness, job loss, missed school, and sickness; homelessness, in particular, can also enhance the spread of COVID-19 as people take refuge with family members, creating more crowded living conditions, or being driven into shelters. The recent average rate increase of \$10.78 a month could be unpayable for households that are already struggling, and a further 4% increase will make that true for more households. The RI PUC has a responsibility to recognize that their decisions do not exist in isolation from the other conditions of Rhode Islanders' lives, but can alleviate or intensify the harm of those conditions, and to act on that understanding. As a RI resident who values my neighbors' well-being in itself and for its bearing on my own well-being, I urge the PUC to rescind the previous rate hike and to reject the further 4% rate hike.

**Allison Allen:** This isn't the time to be increasing electric bills for people in the middle of a pandemic where people are struggling to pay their bills as it is. I do not support this increase!

#### **Lydia Marie**

**Natasha Brennan :**The rate hike is irresponsible. National Grid does not need more money. It hurts working people and families, putting them in another difficult situation while dealing with the unemployment, stress, and other financial costs of the pandemic. Please reverse your votes to help Rhode Islanders live comfortably. Additionally, you should resolve to pass the PIPP as advocated by the George Wiley Center and other activists to protect working people and families into the future.

**Charles Runyon:** Rates should be lowered, not raised. Grid is a foreign-owned, publicly-traded company that gives profits to shareholders and executives. They should not be building a profit on the backs of Rhode Islanders who are struggling to live.

#### **Liza Burkin**

**Ali Gio:** We need our articles of first necessities. And electricity and heat have become part of our survival, politicians in new england don't see it that way. They just want money in their pocket. **Ashley Loughlin:** [This rate increase] would not be okay for students who are doing distance learning. This only will put a strain on parents who are already asking, can I make my monthly payments? Most adults are not working right now, and we're about to be in the winter, [when] not everyone can afford the proper weatherization for their windows. Why squeeze the extra money out of everyone's pockets?

**Valerie Leech:** Because of the economy, with everything happening, [I'm asking the PUC] to hold off and wait [on these rate increases]. Everything else is on hold and on a trial basis. People's financial circumstances are not okay. This pandemic

has interfered in finances and caused many to change their lifestyle, putting many in a financial bind. This is going to give financial hardship to families.

**Kamaldeen:** I don't want them to raise rates. A lot of people are out of a job and it's not fair to them because of the COVID-19 situation.

**Yohannes Bein, Pawtucket:** [National Grid] is out of control and this is not fair. I asked the representatives why they are charging these rates and they don't have an answer. If we don't have some type of justice in the future, many will be shut off.

**Anne Marie:** Many people have no money to even survive. The PUC needs to freeze utilities. What are you going to do, allow people to freeze to death? It's not people's fault they lost their jobs, there's a pandemic, that's above and beyond normal circumstances. The PUC should definitely say you can't do this. Where are the state representatives? They should be saying no, everything is frozen during the pandemic. What about people who work in restaurants that are going out of business? And we have a lot of elderly people in the state, I live in assisted living and there are many elderly. People are desperate to feed their families and keep their lights on. What are you gonna do? What would you do if it was your child? Your job is secure, you're not looking at your job being taken away. National Grid is taking advantage of children, and families going through this. What's going to happen if we're all shut down again? If you have no heat and electricity, how do you cook? You can't feed a family that way. I think National Grid should be ashamed of themselves. The PUC should not be allowing it. Why isn't the governor doing anything? Where do you expect the people to get this money from? That's a horror story. I know people are struggling. The PUC needs to stand up.

**Ricardo Rivera:** National Grid shouldn't charge more. There aren't too many jobs right now. They should take into consideration the things that are going on in this world today, it's pretty different than it was before. Not everyone qualifies for unemployment and it's really hard.

**Michele Caouette:** How can poor people live? How are we going to make it? I can't live like I used to live before now that the prices are getting ridiculous. I'm a single mom and I can't do it like I used to do. This is crazy. I don't remember my bill ever being so high.

**Elie Michel Kousseifi:** It's not time [for a rate increase,] people are suffering. The system works for the rich and not the poor. We're going to day by day lose our human rights. We are disconnected from each other, we accuse and abuse each other, and this helps the system because it keeps us divided. This is a very shameful situation in the richest country in the world. Where is the humanity?

**Nabila Rhouat:** We barely can make it, and we don't know if it's gonna, if we're gonna lose our jobs. For me as a server, it's less business now so I can barely afford to pay how much I can pay. They are billionaires but you still want more money in this crisis? It's not like everything is back to normal.

**Dominique Dockery:** I live in Providence. I am a medical student in Providence. I have seen first hand the impact of this global pandemic on my patients, who are now facing dire health circumstances on top of already challenging economic circumstances. Patients who are now in need of oxygen machines tell me that they can't afford to pay their utility bills on top of medical bills, rent, and food costs. The PUC must reject this proposed rate increase and reverse the existing rate hike to protect ratepayers.

**Patricia Jacobs, North Kingstown:** National Grid utility company raising its rates and adding additional charges in the midst of a pandemic and high unemployment is a heartless move, particularly at this time of year; winter is upon us which means heating bills are looming. I am a 72 year old senior citizen on a small fixed income and the thought of higher utility bills strikes terror in my heart. Where do you think the extra money will come from? I speak for many when I say it's hard enough to keep food on the table, get all the medicines that are keeping us alive and to pay our basic living expenses, including our already costly utility bills here in Rhode Island. Besides the financial problems, for the past seven months we have been in constant fear of getting the coronavirus. Most of us are staying home more, for safety reasons, so it follows that our utility use will increase. Adding to our anxiety by causing more financial hardship in the dead of winter is just plain cruel. I do not have a car so I am relying on delivery services that charge exorbitant fees, which means I already must purchase less food to pay these delivery fees. And now I will be facing living in a very cold home throughout the winter, trying to save even more on heating costs than I usually do, in order to pay for this proposed additional charge.

I kept my thermostat at 58 degrees last winter; how much lower can I go? My concern is not only for the elderly; think of the thousands of low income families with children you are impacting. You may fit into your coat from last winter, but children don't. There will be coats, hats, mittens, scarves and boots to buy. Prices on goods have risen. How can a family afford to adequately clothe their children on an already strapped budget? And you want to charge more to keep them warm? How do they lower the cost of their electric bill? Use candles after dark? Wash clothes less often? Take away the family's only source of entertainment, the tv? The PUC should feel ashamed for giving their approval. Why does the PUC exist if it doesn't protect the public? Their decision to approve any increased cost to Rhode Islanders at this point in time is unconscionable. Please rethink your decision.

**Nina Wolff Landau:** I live in Providence. Amidst a global pandemic that is devastating our state and the world, families are struggling to afford rent, utility bills, food, and other necessities. Even before the pandemic, people of color in Rhode Island and low-income families were already struggling to pay for their basic utilities. Meanwhile, National Grid, a massive corporation, continues to profit. The PUC must reverse the rate hike decision and reject this proposal for an additional increase. I and the other residents of Rhode Island cannot continue to pay increasing fees to benefit a massive corporation or lose access to electricity. If National Grid is struggling financially, which it is not, or needs the money to make improvements, which thus far have not greatly benefited rate payers, they can cut the nearly million dollar salaries of their top executives. To not reverse the past increase and allow a further rate hike would be to sit idly by while National Grid profits off Rhode Islanders' suffering. This is outrageous.

**Lynn K. Finocchiaro:** This is certainly not the time to increase electricity rates in RI. With the pandemic so many families are out of work, have increased childcare expenses as well as other financial stressors. Last I saw, National Grid was making a fine profit and this additional increase is certainly not needed for their bottom line.

**Gerry Willis. Middletown:** I am writing today to urge that you reverse your vote on the National Grid rate increase you approved last Tuesday -- and reject National Grid's additional proposal distribution adjustment charge -- which will once again raise consumer's energy costs by an additional 4%.

As a landlord, I see the struggle many of my tenants have to afford their utility bills each month. Many of them – if not all – live literally paycheck to paycheck before the pandemic. My tenants are hard-working citizens of Rhode Island, often taking second and third jobs to pay their bills. Recently, I have had to lower their monthly rent as they are so strapped for money – I am willing to do it to help them during this terrible time.

Now I am asking you to help – and provide hard working Rhode Island citizens some additional assistance too. This is an insane time to increase anyone's utility rates!

I demand that you reverse your vote on the National Grid rate increase approved last Tuesday -- and reject National Grid's additional proposal distribution adjustment charge!

**Marie C. Hennedy, Ph.D. East Greenwich**



*Organizing for social and economic justice*

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