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Senate of Pennsylvania

Reading

November 3, 2011

The Honorable Robert F. Powelson
Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission
P. O. Box 3265
Harrisburg, PA 17105-3265

Dear Chairman Powelson:

As you probably know, the October 29, 2011 snowstorm dumped in upwards twelve inches of snow or more in Berks County and surrounding counties and left hundreds of thousands of residents and businesses without power.

Berks County has been by far and away the hardest hit county in the Commonwealth in terms of large numbers of people being without electricity for extended periods of time. The length of these outages is more than inconvenient, now it is a downright hardship. People are frustrated and angry. And they have a right to be. While I understand that the utilities prioritize response and restoration efforts, a significant portion of the Eastern section of the City of Reading, a densely populated neighborhood where thousands of people reside, is still without power five days after the storm hit. In Met-Ed's Berks County service territory, 13,822 customers were still without power as of this morning.

While no one could have predicted that a significant storm would deliver a heavy wet snow in late October causing widespread tree and line damage and lengthy power outages, the response of regional electricity utilities to this event seems to have been uneven and plodding. Moreover, there are reports in the press and rumors circulating in the community that some utilities may have reduced their complement of linemen, scaled back their preemptive tree trimming programs, and have been slow to replace aging equipment. This, of course, would diminish the ability of utilities to respond to these types of extraordinary events or at least limit the extent of their impact in the first place.

In light of this information, I am writing to request that the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission review the performance of regional electric utilities to this event with a view toward taking appropriate action to ensure that utilities are properly prepared to respond to similar events in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judith L. Schwank".
Judith L. Schwank
Senator, 11th District

JLS/TG

CC All Concerned Citizens