



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brad Hoylman-Sigal

Senator Brad Hoylman's Testimony at the Public Service Commission Hearing on Con Edison's Power Outages

BRAD HOYLMAN-SIGAL January 27, 2021

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Hello, I am State Senator Brad Hoylman. I represent thousands of New Yorkers, businesses, and institutions that were impacted by the July 2019 power outages.

I want to highlight some of the ways that our community was hurt by these grid outages and shine a light on what is at stake in our present moment.

Mount Sinai West, a hospital in my district with more than 500 hospital beds and an emergency trauma center, was left without power on July 13th for nearly five hours.

Luckily, the hospital sprung into action, activated emergency management protocols, and prevented any loss of life.

Had the outage lasted longer, serious complications could have arisen for the hospital and the many patients present.

With the summer heat and no way to cool the hospital, a longer outage could have proved fatal to some of the most vulnerable patients.

Life saving medications that require cold temperatures were at risk of spoiling.

If subway service had not returned when it did, the next shift at the hospital would have been unable to arrive on time and the hospital would have been severely understaffed in the midst of an emergency.

These are just a few of the challenges that our hospitals were forced to face when ConEd's electric grid failed our community. We were lucky that no one died at Mount Sinai West that night because of the outage, but relying on good fortune is not good policy.

As we face an unprecedented public health emergency with hospitals already working at capacity, any additional hurdles (such as a power outage) will undoubtedly result in unnecessary loss of life.

As we face the challenge of vaccinating millions of New Yorkers, we cannot afford to lose any doses of the life saving vaccine. However, with strict temperature regulation critical to both of our current vaccines, any failure of our electric grid will likely result in spoiled doses.

Each additional dose is one more senior citizen or essential worker that does not have to live each moment in fear.

In addition to the burden these outages placed on our hospitals, I want to highlight the immense losses that our local businesses experienced because of the outages.

In particular, restaurants and theaters suffered greatly due to the power outages.

The night of July 13th, 26 of 30 Broadway shows were forced to cancel. This resulted in the loss of over \$3.5 million dollars in revenue.

Local restaurants reported loss of sales over 50% on what is usually one of their busiest times of year, a Saturday evening in the summer.

Some restaurants experience equipment failure due to the power outage. Olympic Flame Diner reported their refrigerator was damaged in the outage and a replacement cost them \$5,000.

Countless restaurants lost costly inventory as their refrigerators lost power and food went bad.

Other restaurants failed their health inspections because their refrigerators were not able to keep food at the proper temperature.

These businesses faced tremendous damage and cost because of ConEd's grid outage.

Today these industries are in crisis during the pandemic.

As we fight to save these businesses from the brink, imagine what another power outage would do to the ones that are still fighting to stay open.

The thousands of restaurants that are barely scraping by have no emergency funds left.

Any power outage today could quite frankly be the final blow to many of our local businesses and cause a new wave of unemployment in our City.

8 days after the first outage in July 2019, as everyone warned that an impending heat wave would be the next test for ConEd, another outage occurred despite the many warnings.

Even more is on the line today when our hospitals and businesses struggle to overcome our economic and public health emergencies.

The health and financial wellbeing of our City is on the line.

The pandemic has made it abundantly clear: we need utilities that are responsive to the needs of our community.

Senator Gianaris has introduced a package of reforms, including legislation to create a blue ribbon panel to recommend nominees to the New York State Public Service Commission, a bill to eliminate the current liability shield utility companies enjoy during service interruption, if utility negligence is proven, and a bill to expand the scope of management audits the New York State Public Service Commission can perform on utility providers.

This package is an important step to ensure that all utilities, including ConEd, operate with the public's best interest in mind.

A reliable and affordable electric grid is more important now more than ever, these reforms will help move us towards that goal.