



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pete Harckham

## Harckham, Senate Pass Legislation to Improve Utility Services

PETE HARCKHAM February 24, 2021

| ISSUE: **PUBLIC UTILITIES, EMERGENCY STORM RESPONSE, OVERSIGHT**



*Albany, NY* – New York State Senator Pete Harckham and members of the State Senate passed a package of 10 bills this week to ensure the utility services New Yorkers depend on meet added criteria for safety and regulation. Most importantly, the Public Service Corporation will be granted a stronger role in the enforcement of public utilities to improve storm planning and response.

“Protecting the rights of utility customers is essential as the increasing number of severe storms continues to cause outages across the state,” said Harckham. “These bills will provide

greater oversight and accountability, while also making utility companies financially liable to customers when laggard storm responses cause spoiled food and medicines.”

The new legislation will extend the Covid-19 moratorium for utility service disconnections; hold utilities accountable for failures in restoring service; ensure that utility companies do not pass on the cost of legislative lobbying to customers; provide a voice for consumer advocacy within the Public Service Commission and strengthen the standards for utility service provider’s emergency response plans.

In addition to these measures, this package will require new gas infrastructure projects to be approved by a professional engineer and add public oversight to the pay rates of top utility executives.

The legislation passed by the Senate Majority, includes:

- \* Utility Moratorium: S.1453A extends the moratorium on utility shut-offs until December 31, 2021, or when the Covid-19 state of emergency is lifted or expires.
- \* Protecting Customers Lobbying Costs: S.1556 protects utility customers from unknowingly paying for lobbying activity.
- \* Electricity Plan for Essential Medical Needs: S.931A identifies the specific medical equipment that qualifies for essential electricity and additional utility outreach during outages.
- \* Utility Reimbursement: S.929B provides consumers with a bill discount when a contracted service provider fails to provide the agreed upon service.
- \* Utility Consumer Advocacy in the Public Service Commission: S.1199 requires at least one commissioner of the public service commission to have experience in advocating in the interests of utility consumers.
- \* Emergency Response Plan Requirement: S.968 establishes the criteria for the Long Island

Power Authority and its service provider's emergency response plans, and subjects them to review, approval and enforcement by the Public Service Commission.

\* Stronger Utility Storm Response: S.4960 removes restrictions on the Public Service Commission's ability to penalize utility company violations, and enhances oversight of utilities to ensure improved storm planning and response.

\* Professional Engineer Approval Requirement: S.544 requires a professional engineer to review and approve a gas infrastructure project to prevent public utility accidents from occurring in New York.

\* Public Statements of Compensation: S.1544A requires large utility companies to publicly report the annual pay of their top employees.

\* Reimbursement for Lost Food or Medicine: S.3784A provides a customer reimbursement for lost food or medicines due to an extended power outage.

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#### RELATED LEGISLATION

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### **2021-S4960**

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- Introduced
  
- ◦ In Committee Assembly
  - In Committee Senate
  
- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly

- On Floor Calendar Senate

- ◦ Passed Assembly

- Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Relates to strengthening of utility storm response and compliance

February 19, 2021

In Assembly Committee

Sponsored by [Shelley B. Mayer](#)

Do you support this bill?