

To Governor Gina Raimondo,

We the undersigned, a group of local grassroots organizations and concerned Rhode Islanders, are writing in regard to the process of appointing a new Chair to the Public Utilities Commission of Rhode Island. We believe that the nomination of Laura Olton to the position demonstrated a critical lack of consideration for conflicts of interest in the commission's role. The PUC is often seen as a rubber stamp for National Grid and other large corporations, and potential conflicts of interest such as Ms. Olton's association with NationalGrid intensify that perception. Ms. Olton's withdrawal of her name from consideration presents an opportunity to take a more collaborative, informed and transparent approach to nominating a candidate for this important position.

Of course, a discussion on energy and utility policy must first and foremost confront the existential threat of climate change. We recently learned that Rhode Island is the fastest-warming of the lower 48 states, having already experienced 2 degrees Celsius of warming. The issue of climate change is the most pressing question of our era, threatening the very existence of humanity on this planet, and the PUC Chair has a critical role to play in making sure Rhode Island takes both the steps needed to avert the worst of the coming catastrophe and to protect residents against climate shocks. Their position as chair of the Energy Facility Siting Board gives them a vital place in the fight against climate change. The PUC also has a critical role in making sure that any transition to a new system will be a just transition, ensuring that those economically dependent on the current system will not be displaced and that those most affected by the current system's faults are compensated and empowered.

As groups that consider access to energy utilities to be a basic human right, that believes no person should be denied their basic rights for any reason, and that places equity, sustainability and democracy as central goals to guide the development of any policy or institution, we believe that any future nominee to the position of PUC Chair should be someone who:

- Lacks any potential conflicts of interest, professional or otherwise, relating to their role as Chair on behalf of the people of Rhode Island.
- Is committed to practicing complete public transparency in the operation of the PUC.
- Demonstrates a willingness to exercise the power of the commission to regulate utilities in RI.
- Will treat climate change as the existential crisis that it is, and will take steps needed to avert the worst of the crisis., including adhering to the greenhouse gas emission targets of the Resilient Rhode Island Act.
- Supports the implementation of a percentage of income payment plan (PIPP) for energy utilities state-wide to alleviate cost burdens on Rhode Island's lowest income households.
- Supports a complete and permanent moratorium on residential service shutoffs due to inability to pay.
- Is committed to the complete transition to renewable energy sources by 2030.
- Is opposed to the construction of any new fossil fuel infrastructure.
- Supports the municipalization of utilities in Rhode Island and elsewhere, and opposes their privatization.
- Recognizes the necessity of a just transition to a new energy system, one which will benefit rather than displace those relying on the current energy system for employment.
- Is committed to combating and repairing the effects of historic and contemporary environmental racism.
- Is representative of, or has a history of working alongside and empowering Rhode Island's vulnerable communities most critically affected by utility costs, and has lived in Rhode Island or has significant ties to community and place here.

- Recognizes that they serve the interests of the people of Rhode Island, not the corporations which too often are unjustly rewarded.

Additionally, we acknowledge that our concerns and perspectives are not the only ones relevant to this issue, and ask that your office take a more collaborative and open approach to selecting a new nominee for the position. We ask that you communicate directly with grassroots organizations, such as those undersigned, that work directly with the individuals and families most impacted by utilities policy in Rhode Island for their input on the nomination. We ask that you be transparent about the timeline and considerations for your future nominations to allow the public time to share concerns with these groups. The chair of the PUC must be someone who the public can trust to act in their best interests. Along with the criteria we have laid out above, a clear and fair process in selecting a nominee is the first step toward achieving that goal.

We look forward to hearing back from you. A response can be directly sent to Executive@provdsa.org.

In Solidarity,

The Providence Democratic Socialists of America

Coyote RI

The George Wiley Center

Progressive Democrats of Rhode Island

SUGSE (Stand Up for Graduate Student Employees) Organizing Committee

Working Families Party of Rhode Island

Climate Action Rhode Island - 350

National Lawyer's Guild of Rhode Island

Civic Alliance for a Cooler Rhode Island

Sam Bell, State Senate 5th District

Rachel Miller, Providence City Council Ward 13

Alex Kithes, Woonsocket City Council

Monica Huertas, Candidate for Providence City Council, Ward 10