

## Murphy, Blumenthal Call for Review of Utility Cooperatives in Wake of Snowstorm

WASHINGTON-Senator Richard Blumenthal and Congressman Chris Murphy called for a comprehensive review by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission of cooperative utility Mutual Assistance Groups (MAGs) in the wake of the massive snowstorm and subsequent power outages that ravaged Connecticut two weeks ago.

### MAG

programs exist to support utilities in contracting for additional line and repair crews when in-house manpower proves insufficient in the wake of a major outage.

"The most recent storm experienced by our state was anything but typical, and we have serious concerns that shortcomings on the part of MAG system - as well as our state's largest investor-owned utility - contributed to the unusually slow pace of recovery in many parts of the state hit hardest by the storm," the lawmakers wrote. "Not only did the system prove sluggish in providing the necessary number of crews needed to fully implement the massive restoration effort (with many communities going for more than a week with little or no assistance), the system by which requests were made for additional crews remained opaque to many local and state leaders. Given these concerns, we ask that the Commission conduct a comprehensive review of Mutual Assistance Group programs as they exist today."

Full  
text of the letter:

November  
17, 2011

The  
Honorable Jon Wellinghoff

Chairman

Federal  
Energy Regulatory Commission

888  
First Street, NE

Washington,  
DC 20426

Dear  
Chairman Wellinghoff,

As you know, the record-breaking October snow storm Alfred tore through Connecticut and much of the Northeast on October 29-30, 2011. While our state's congressional delegation has previously requested an investigation by the Commission into reliability issues created by the storm, we would like to request your assistance in a related - but distinct - set of concerns regarding cooperative utility Mutual Assistance Groups (MAGs).

MAG programs exist to support utilities in contracting for additional line and repair crews when in-house manpower proves insufficient in the wake of a major outage. By providing an informal and ad-hoc network of regional utility-to-utility cooperatives, these groups typically function well in delivering the necessary crews in the aftermath of significant storms.

However, the most recent storm experienced by our state was anything but typical, and we have serious concerns that shortcomings on the part of MAG system - as well as our state's largest investor-owned utility - contributed to the unusually slow pace of recovery in many parts of the state hit hardest by the storm. Not only did the system prove sluggish in providing the necessary number of crews needed to fully implement the massive restoration effort (with many communities going for more than a week with little or no assistance), the system by which requests were made for additional crews remained opaque to many local and state leaders - an information deficit which further impaired non-utility clean-up and safety efforts.

In the face of another disaster on the scale of Winter Storm Alfred, we are concerned that the MAG system may prove similarly deficient in ensuring that our constituents receive needed assistance to clear roads, repair distribution networks, and repower transmission equipment.

Given these concerns, we ask that the Commission conduct a comprehensive review of Mutual Assistance Group programs as they exist today. While state and utility-led investigations of the storm response are already underway, we want to know if there are features of these systems that would benefit from greater inter-state and inter-utility coordination on behalf of federal authorities.

While we understand that the efficient functioning of electrical distribution networks are currently regulated by the states, we believe that the Commission's experience in ensuring the reliability of the electrical transmission and bulk power systems will be useful in developing improvements to the existing MAG framework.

We would also ask that you provide us with your assessment of any additional statutory authority that the Commission (or other federal agencies) would require to implement any and all recommendations that you provide.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this request.

Sincerely,

Christopher  
S. Murphy  
Blumenthal

Richard

Member  
of Congress  
States Senator

United

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