



Office of the  
First Selectman

# TOWN OF LEBANON

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August 11, 2020

Dear Sen. Cathy Osten, Rep. Brian Smith, and Rep. Doug Dubitsky:

It has been one week since Tropical Storm Isaias hit and some Lebanon residents are still without power. While the majority have finally been restored as of yesterday, there are still over a dozen Lebanon families on their seventh day in this brutal August heat without electricity — and that's based on Eversource's "official" public-facing count. Based on my conversations with residents, I believe that number is still higher than reported.

Fortunately, we are now in a place to start looking to the other side of this disaster and that means holding Eversource accountable for their failings. There's no sugar-coating the terrible response we saw to this storm. From day one, it was clear: Eversource was not prepared for this event and their lack of preparation has put the lives of Lebanon residents in danger for a week.

With over 95 percent of residents without power, I opened emergency cooling and charging stations, offered water 24/7 at our high school, and opened our high school showers for public access. Sadly, many residents were unable to take advantage of these because they were trapped in their homes by downed trees and powerlines which blocked their streets in both directions.

From Tuesday night through Saturday, residents of four different streets were essentially trapped in their homes by downed trees entangled in Eversource's wires. As a municipality, we have no ability to clear these trees once wires are involved. We rely on Eversource and their subcontractors to perform this work. Being without power is difficult, but the very first priority in any storm is not power restoration. The first priority is safety. People need to be able to leave their homes and emergency vehicles need to be able to access those homes in the event of a fire, EMS, or other emergency call.

Eversource provides guidelines to the Town on how to report and prioritize sites based on the need to first "make safe" our roads. For whatever reason, Eversource disregarded their own safety-based playbook on this storm. While they haphazardly assigned crews to restore power, residents in some areas were left trapped and critical needs were ignored. These sites needed to be cleared on day one, as soon as crews were able to safely operate. These residents should not have been left stranded for nearly five days.

On Wednesday, I formally requested that Eversource prioritize power restoration to a lower income senior living facility near the center of town located at 12 Dr. Manning Drive. I received no official response except that Eversource would consider the request. While we waited, I visited the complex. Residents were in relatively good spirits and had access to a small one-room community center with a generator. In the age of COVID19, seeing residents in their seventies, eighties, and up gathering in a small space like this just to stay cool on a 90-degree day is unacceptable.

In Lebanon, I have one utility that came through, the great team at Bozrah Light and Power, and one utility that completely dropped the ball: Eversource. I have great respect for the tree crews and linemen who worked this disaster for both companies. This is not their fault. Management at Eversource is to blame for this catastrophe.

Some officials and lawmakers in the state have called for the resignation of Eversource CEO James Judge. Whether Judge does or does not resign makes no difference to me as First Selectman of Lebanon. The problems with Eversource predate Judge and the problems at Eversource will not be fixed by changing one leader. There is a structural problem with this company. Sometimes when companies get too big, they can't service customers in the ways they should. Eversource appears to be in this category.

It is time for the state to make a serious effort to hold Eversource accountable and to drive change that will benefit residents of this state and small towns like Lebanon which are too often left on the backburner. Eversource's lack of planning, poor communication, and overreliance on out-of-state contractors made a bad situation worse. No one can control the weather, but preparedness and good communication can help us respond effectively when we have a storm like Isaias. We know our towns best and while Eversource knows their grid, we know the priorities. They, or whatever replaces them, need to listen to municipal leaders and emergency responders when we tell them there's a problem somewhere.

It is time for accountability. Residents have no choice when it comes to their electrical delivery service. They can choose a supplier, but when the delivery lines are down, they are out of luck. They can't refuse to pay their bill or switch companies just because Eversource underperformed. The average resident has no tools to hold Eversource accountable, so it is up to leaders like you in the state to stand up for the residents of communities like this one.

We need you to be our voice on this issue. What happened during this storm cannot be allowed to happen again.

I am happy to testify at any point on this issue.

Sincerely,



Kevin T. Cwikla  
First Selectman

CC: Sen. Norm Needleman, Co-Chair Energy and Technology Committee  
Rep. David Arconti, Jr., Co-Chair Energy and Technology Committee