RE: Residential Fixed Customer Charges

Dear Commissioners Rhodes, Sayre, Burman, and Alesi:

The undersigned 131 signatories are elected officials representing cities, towns, and counties in upstate New York. We appreciate the important work the Public Service Commission is doing to implement much needed utility and energy reform as part of the Reforming the Energy Vision (REV). However, ever increasing energy costs continue to burden our residents and small businesses.

A major driver of these costs are stubbornly high fixed charges for electricity, which customers must pay every month regardless of how much energy they use. **We write to urge you to reduce these high fixed charges.** These charges greatly constrain the ability of our residents and small businesses to control their energy bills by using less or by installing renewable energy systems like solar PV, and as such, are contrary to the Governor’s REV initiative and clean energy goals. High fixed charges also shift costs from bigger energy users to more vulnerable populations. They are particularly burdensome for the low and moderate income members of our communities, who tend to use less energy than average and pay a disproportionate amount of their income toward these high fixed charges. New York needs electricity pricing that works to alleviate this problem, not worsen it.

Utilities in New York have very high fixed charges compared to other states. For example, National Grid has a residential fixed charge of $17 in New York, but only $5 in Rhode Island and $5.50 in Massachusetts. In Central Hudson territory, residential customers have even higher fixed charges at $24—the highest in the state—and the company is now seeking to increase these charges to $25, as well as introduce a new tiered “service size charge” for many customers. Fixed charges in New York are higher than in all neighboring states, and impose an unacceptable burden on our communities.

While the Commission should be commended for denying utilities’ requests to increase fixed charges in recent years, we urge you to now join states like Connecticut in seeking to reduce them. A major reduction in residential fixed charges in the current National Grid and Central Hudson rate cases would benefit a majority of residential customers by lowering their bills, and would particularly help low-usage customers, which typically include low- and moderate-income households, seniors, the disabled, and conservation-minded customers. Reducing the fixed charge to below $10 would make New York a national leader on this issue and would help the state meet its energy and environmental goals.

Thank you for your consideration and your commitment to protecting the ratepayers of New York.

Sincerely,

Doug Bullock, County Legislator, Albany County (National Grid)
William Reinhardt, County Legislator, Albany County (National Grid)
Francena Amparo, Assistant Minority Leader, Dutchess County (Central Hudson)
Joseph Incoronato, County Legislator, Dutchess County (Central Hudson)
Joel Tyner, County Legislator, Dutchess County (Central Hudson)
Micki Strawinski, County Legislator, Dutchess County (Central Hudson)
Chad Davis, County Legislator, Oneida County (National Grid)
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Steve Noble, Mayor, City of Kingston (Central Hudson)
Jean Kessner, Councilor-at-Large, City of Syracuse (National Grid)
Christopher Cannon, Town Councilman, Town of Arkwright (National Grid)
Dawn Ryder, Town Councilman, Town of Bethel (NYSEG)
Daniel Joyce, Town Councilman, Town of Cairo (Central Hudson)
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Dennis Young, Trustee, Village of New Paltz (Central Hudson)
Don Kerr, Trustee, Village of New Paltz (Central Hudson)
KT Tobin, Trustee, Village of New Paltz (Central Hudson)
William "Bill" Murray, Trustee, Village of New Paltz (Central Hudson)
John Codman III, Trustee, Village of Ossining (Con Edison)
William E Murphy, Mayor, Village of Saugerties (Central Hudson)
Joel L. Griffith, Mayor, Village of Tivoli (Central Hudson)
William B. Magnarelli, NY Assembly, 129th District
Timothy M. Kennedy, NY Senate, 63rd District