

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 14, 2018

Mr. Steve Bryant
President
Columbia Gas of Massachusetts
P.O. Box 2025
Springfield, MA 01102

Dear Mr. Bryant:

We write to express our deep concern about, and to seek further clarification regarding, the woefully inadequate response of Columbia Gas of Massachusetts (Columbia Gas) to the gas explosions that spread through the communities of Lawrence, North Andover, and Andover, Massachusetts on Thursday, September 13, 2018.

As we continue to gather more information as to the cause of this incident, latest reports indicate that the gas-line explosion has left at least one person dead, and twenty-five injured; damaged or destroyed dozens of homes; and displaced thousands of residents in the Merrimack Valley. Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker has now declared a state of emergency as these communities begin to recover. The explosions have been linked to natural gas distribution pipelines operated by your company, which is why we are troubled by the failure of you and your leadership team to effectively communicate with customers, impacted communities, local and state officials, as well as respond to inquiries from our offices over the past twenty-four hours.

For this reason, we request that you respond to the following questions:

1. Before the explosions on Thursday, Columbia Gas notified customers that it would be “upgrading natural gas lines in neighborhoods across the state.” Did you have adequate local staff available to handle this upgrade and were they adequately trained to complete this upgrade safely? To the best of your knowledge, did Columbia Gas crews properly follow all procedures necessary to safely complete and test the upgrade?
2. Reports of first responders combating numerous fires and gas explosions in Andover, North Andover, and Lawrence began at 4pm on Thursday. Columbia Gas did not make any announcement or public statement about this incident until 9pm that evening. Can you please explain why it took four hours for your company to provide an update and response on your website? How soon after the first reports of gas explosions in the area did you begin reaching out to impacted stakeholders and customers?
3. Representatives from Columbia Gas did not arrive in the impacted areas to assist their customers until late this morning. Media outlets report these representatives refused to

answer questions and quickly departed.¹ How does Columbia Gas plan to address the questions and concerns raised by its customers?

4. It is our understanding that Columbia Gas crews need to visit each of the 8,600 affected customers to shut off each gas meter and conduct a safety inspection. How long do you estimate this process will take and how will you ensure that your customers are informed in a timely manner when the safety inspection is complete?
5. Does Columbia Gas have a plan to compensate the customers whose homes were damaged or destroyed, or to provide restitution or other support for families of those killed or hurt?
6. How does Columbia Gas plan to compensate the municipalities and state agencies who incurred incredible costs responding to this incident?
7. Did Columbia Gas have an emergency plan to address the eventuality of gas explosions like those that occurred this week? If so, were all procedures in this plan followed after the explosions began?
8. Prior to September 13, 2018, did Columbia Gas have any warning or indication – from company staff, contractors, regulators, or any other entity – about potential gas explosion risks in the Merrimack Valley? If so, please describe these warnings and any actions taken in response.
9. Was this an isolated event? Is there a possibility that similar gas explosions could occur in other areas in the coming days?
10. What comprehensive safety measures is Columbia Gas taking to ensure that similar events do not happen in the future?


Thoughts and prayers are not enough. The residents of Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover want answers, and they deserve them. As local, state, and federal partners continue to gather information and assist those in need of food, water, shelter, and medical care, we hope that you will provide much-needed clarity as to how this incident happened and how Columbia Gas will prevent a similar event from occurring in the future.


We look forward to your response and thank you for your attention to this important matter.

¹ Boston Globe, “Politicians, residents frustrated over gas company’s public response,” Matt Rocheleau, Milton J. Valencia, and David Abel, September 14, 2018, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/09/14/frustration-grows-over-gas-company-public-response/dORF1TNipmc455MLC28KUM/story.html>.

Sincerely,


SETH MOULTON
United States Representative


EDWARD J. MARKEY
United States Senator


NIKI TSONGAS
United States Representative


ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senator