

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 15, 2019

Stephen H. Bryant
President and Chief Operating Officer
Columbia Gas of Massachusetts
4 Technology Drive
Westborough, MA 01581

Joseph Hamrock
President and Chief Executive Officer
NiSource
801 E. 86th Avenue
Merrillville, IN 46410

Dear Mr. Hamrock and Mr. Bryant,

We write in regards to the backdated gas bills that are beginning to arrive in the mailboxes of your customers in the Greater Lawrence service area. In prior conversations with our offices, company leadership indicated that bills would resume in December, but at the same time, assured our staff that customers would not receive sizeable retroactive bills with due dates in January. However, consumers are now receiving large backdated bills just after the holiday season and during the more expensive winter heating months. Your company's actions are placing an untenable strain on the budgets of far too many local residents. We are especially disturbed by the reported lack of communication between your company and customers that would have alerted them that these backdated bills would be forthcoming or presented clear options to engage in deferred payment or payment plans over time.¹

While we are glad to see your plan to send out an explanation and begin a radio advertisement campaign, the current situation is causing significant confusion and we ask that you respond to the following questions about how this situation was allowed to come about and how you intend to effectively and clearly resolve it.

Additionally, the January 7 newsletter to customers in the Greater Lawrence service area states, "As happens every year, your rate was adjusted from summer to winter rates due to a change in gas cost which reflects less than a 1.5 percent increase as compared to last winter." It is abhorrent that Columbia Gas would attempt to institute even a business-as-usual rate increase on

¹ Zoe Mathews, "Gas customers face 'sticker shock,'" The Eagle-Tribune (Dec. 31, 2018), https://www.eagletribune.com/news/merrimack_valley/gas-customers-face-sticker-shock/article_4955ffe1-6bbb-5737-862b-6f3d7b0c5f53.html.

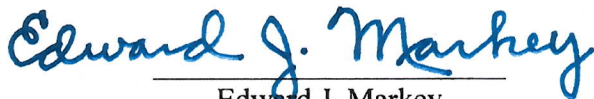
these communities that have been dealing with this disaster as they are trying to rebuild their communities and their lives. Your company should immediately suspend any planned rate increases on these communities in the Merrimack Valley.

Please provide a response to the following questions by January 19, 2018:

1. Did Columbia Gas at any time inform customers in the Greater Lawrence service area who did not lose service due to the explosions that they would receive backdated bills with due dates in January? If so, please provide all written examples of this communication. If not, why not?
 - a. If customers are unable to pay the sizable bills in one month, what options are your company offering for deferred or delayed payment, without late charges? How are you making all of your customers in the region aware of those options or services?
2. Is it clearly stated on the bill that customers have options to pay the bill in installments or that they have access to a time extension to make back payments?
3. For those customers who installed temporary alternative heat sources, we understood that you would be covering the difference in cost.
 - a. How are you calculating the reimbursement generated by alternative heating sources?
 - b. How are you communicating that to your customers?
4. Will you commit to immediately suspend the winter rate increase in the Greater Lawrence service area?

We look forward to your prompt response. At a time when families are often stretching their budgets to cover holiday expenses and higher bills, an unexpected bill of hundreds of dollars can come as an unwelcome devastating surprise.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator



Seth Moulton
Member of Congress



Lori Trahan
Member of Congress