

**Remarks to the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy
Regarding the FUTURE Act, H. 2849/S. 1940
November 12, 2019**

Good afternoon, Chairman Barrett, Chairman Golden, and members of the committee. My name is Lise Olney and I'm a member of the Wellesley Board of Selectmen. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Our board recently voted unanimously to support the principles of the FUTURE Act as outlined in the resolution we've submitted to this committee.

I'm here today to underscore why this bill matters to municipalities like ours struggling with the challenges of the crumbling gas system.

First, thank you for your previous legislative efforts to address the persistent problem of gas leaks. On the municipal level, we too have been working to try to address this issue. In Wellesley, town officials, staff, and residents have organized forums, commissioned a gas leak study, conducted methane testing near planting sites for shade trees, reported active leaks near our schools and preschools.

A year ago, we also joined representatives of 20 towns in National Grid territory, including Boston, who shared our frustration at the lack of progress on gas leaks. Together, we formed a multi-town gas leaks initiative made of DPW directors, town managers, elected officials, and advocates, along with the Metropolitan Area Planning Council. After many meeting hours, our group sent a letter to National Grid in January 2019 with specific suggestions for improving communication, coordination, and data sharing to speed the repair of large volume leaks. Many months later, National Grid joined us at a meeting of our group -- just two weeks ago. Unfortunately, they were not able to offer concrete responses to most of our suggestions and we continue without tangible results.

In short, despite years of effort -- we aren't making much progress. In Wellesley and many other towns, the situation is actually getting worse. The number of leaks is going up, not down.

Meanwhile, there is a rising sense of urgency about the effects of methane leaks on public safety, public health, and the existential threat of climate change. Like many towns, Wellesley is working toward a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but our efforts are undermined by the massive amount of methane emitted 24/7 from underground pipes.

We need a new way forward — and the FUTURE Act would provide that. It would empower municipalities to build stronger and more transparent relationships with gas companies by improving coordination for leak repair and greatly increasing required reporting and information sharing. It would also provide municipalities with a voice in DPU proceedings and would allow us to pursue remedies at the DPU instead of the courts for damages to our roads and trees.

But perhaps most importantly, the FUTURE Act would allow us to transition to a future *without gas* by permitting gas companies to distribute renewable thermal energy. Already, some homeowners are adopting alternatives such as air-source heat pumps and electric induction stoves but we need a utility scale solution that allows affordable access to renewable thermal energy for everyone — and a livable future for all our communities. Municipalities are recognizing the urgent need for such a transition — and we are counting on the Legislature to make it possible. Thank you.

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