

Lawrence, Andover and North Andover Faith Communities

October 4, 2018

Stephen H Bryant, President and Chief Operating Officer
Columbia Gas of Massachusetts
4 Technology Drive Suite 250
Westborough, MA 01581

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

Dear Presidents Bryant and Hamrock,

We are writing you today as members of faith communities across Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover. We have come together to provide mutual support to each other and our neighbors as we recover our lives following the natural gas crisis caused by Columbia Gas. Those of us in the affected area continue to live without heat, hot water, or adequate cooking appliances – a situation that imperils the health and well-being of everyone, but especially the fragile and sick among us.

We want to acknowledge the efforts that have been made on our behalf. We applaud our local elected officials who have demonstrated leadership and resolve. We also are grateful for the Columbia Gas claims center workers, MEMA staff, National Guard distributing hot plates and tradespersons from all over the country who are laying new natural gas pipelines and inspecting the equipment in our homes.

The purpose of our letter today is to request a meeting with you as soon as possible to present the outlines of our plan to supply our homes with heat at once and replace our damaged equipment. The goal will be to identify NiSource / Columbia Gas next steps to move the plan toward action and build a more resilient infrastructure for our communities.

The release of the Greater Lawrence Area Restoration Program – Gas Ready Construction Plan Oct. 2nd helps provide a clearer idea on how our damaged equipment and pipelines will be inspected, replaced if necessary, and reconnected. The Oct. 3rd Boston Globe ad taken out by NiSource / Columbia Gas conveys your commitment to working hard to restore our community.

However, there are two critical issues that remain to be addressed:

- **First, there is no strategy to supply our homes with heat immediately.** Residents have a very pressing need for heat right now, that will only grow more acute in the coming weeks and months. This is an urgent priority and alternatives are available that must be provided without delay.

- **Second, we need choice** in the heating equipment, hot water heaters and ranges that are offered as alternatives to those that were damaged, and we need choice in the fuel source that will be used to power them.

In Massachusetts the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2008 requires a 25% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions below 1990 baseline emissions by 2020, and 80% reduction by 2050. The Green Communities Act calls on utilities to reduce emissions through residential energy efficiency programs and progressively increasing the percentage of clean energy they purchase. As faith communities we support these efforts as good stewardship of our human and natural resources. **These emissions reduction, energy efficiency and clean energy goals MUST be integrated into the new infrastructure that is now being built.** This can be done through addressing the two critical issues listed above. We propose the following:

- **To supply our homes with heat immediately:**

On October 1st the Baker-Polito Administration announced the launch of the “Affordable Access to Clean and Efficient Energy Initiative” to help low and moderate-income residents access cost saving, clean and efficient energy technologies. Part of this initiative is promotion of cold climate air source heat pumps (ASHP). These can be installed to provide heating and cooling for a single room or an entire home and are 2-3 times more efficient than electric resistance heating. **To immediately supply heat to homes of residents impacted by the gas crisis we call on Columbia Gas to dispatch qualified contractors to install at least one ASHPs in all homes which request this appliance.**

- **To provide choice in the heating equipment, hot water heaters and ranges that are offered as alternatives to those damaged, and choice in the fuel source used to power them:**

High quality, energy efficient, low emissions heating equipment and hot water heaters have already been vetted by the residential programs operated by Massachusetts Clean Energy Center, MassSave and the Department of Energy Resources. These technologies reduce greenhouse gas emissions and often provide lifetime consumer utility cost savings. **Columbia Gas should offer immediately coordinate with these programs to create a list including a variety of select models that will then be provided to impacted residents, so they can choose equipment to be installed in their homes.**

- **For heating equipment** - At a minimum, ASHPs, residential modern wood heating, and high efficiency furnaces and natural gas condenser boiler models should be offered. As an alternative energy source, the option of combining residential solar photovoltaic panels with ASHPs should be available. Solarize Lowell has just procured contractors for a PVC/ASHP residential design and could be a resource. Once a single ASHP is installed for immediate heat, additional heads could be added to maximize use of the condenser.
- **For hot water heaters** - At a minimum high efficiency electric heat pump, gas & electric tankless, gas tank, and solar hot water models should be offered.
- **For ranges** – Provide choice between natural gas and electric ranges, with electric ranges that offer a convection oven and/or an induction cooktop.

To facilitate education on equipment options, residents will need Columbia Gas to prepare cost comparison sheets on annual expenses to operate equipment. Teams should provide this information to each resident when they perform the “Assessment” step toward making a home “House Ready” for service restoration. Further, equipment options should be disseminated by social media, radio, television, newspapers, billboards and through flyers in all three communities, at a minimum.

To ensure that only qualified contractors install selected equipment, we strongly recommend Columbia Gas coordinate fully with MassSave Home Performance Contractors and their subcontractor network - all of whom are qualified installers. The Solarize Mass Lowell and HeatSmart Massachusetts program could also be resources for contractors ready to serve aggregated customers.

When contractors complete the Repairs and Installation step to be “House Ready”, we strongly recommend residents are scheduled for a near future MassSave Home Energy Assessment to reduce energy bills and make homes more comfortable and energy efficient. Residents should be scheduled regardless of whether they are homeowners, landlords or renters.

Energy infrastructure in the Merrimack Valley must be rebuilt, and it must be done for greater resiliency, so we’ll never again experience the shock and disruption of the gas explosions that are still reverberating in the lives of Lawrence, Andover and North Andover residents today.

As faith communities we are well aware of the social and public health damages from carbon pollution that mount each day. It behooves us to rebuild an energy infrastructure with fewer health and safety hazards, and that will bring us closer to meeting our emissions reduction goals.

We call on you to make high efficiency ASHPs available to heat homes without delay! Residents also must be provided with heating and hot water equipment options and information derived from our sophisticated state energy programs. Cold weather is closing in, with the threat of tragic health consequences for strong and vulnerable Merrimack Valley residents alike!

Presidents Bryant and Hamrock, to accomplish these goals requires the resolve to get it done. Please let us know when you are available to meet with our faith communities within the next week. We look forward to determining next steps to advance the plan we’ve proposed to supply heat and provide equipment choice to our residents so together we create a more resilient energy infrastructure.

In faith,

Rev. Lee Bluemel,
North Parish of North Andover, Unitarian Universalist
minister@northparish.org 978-687-7948

Rev. Joel Almono
Rector, Grace Episcopal Church
joelalmono@hotmail.com 978-902-6285

Rev. Dr. Richard Haley
First-Calvary Baptist Church, North Andover

Helen Cymbala
Society of Elder Faiths, Merrimack Valley

Cantor Vera Broekhuysen
Temple Emanu-el, Haverhill, N.A. Resident

Susan Malloy
Great Pond Buddhist Sangha, N. Andover

West Parish, Andover

South Church, Andover

Other individual clergy members from local faith communities to be added.

Supporting congregations

Rev. Victoria Alford Guest
Rector, First Congregational Church in Natick. MVP

Hancock Church, Lexington

Additional to be added.

Supporting Organizations:

Jim Nail, President
Massachusetts Interfaith Power and Light

Fran Ludwig, Chair
Boston Catholic Climate Movement

Additional to be added.

Merrimack Valley Project?

Gas Leaks Alliance?

HEET?