

March 17, 2025

RI House Corporations Committee  
Rhode Island State House  
82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI 02903

RE: H5815 AN ACT RELATING TO PUBLIC UTILITIES AND CARRIERS -- PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

Dear Members of the House Corporations Committee:

Our firm represents many clean energy interests in Rhode Island. We commonly advocate for the elimination of barriers to the new energy economy promised by Rhode Island's Act on Climate. We write in support of H5815.

Advocates for the public interest are outgunned in regulatory proceedings. The utility brings abundant resources to such proceedings – hired lawyers and experts and lots of staff. They claim that their advocacy is a fundamental element of their chartered right to serve as a monopoly energy interest, even when their advocacy is clearly contrary to state policy and the public interest. In contrast, those seeking to advocate for other interests must foot the bill themselves and rarely have the resources to fully staff the team needed to effectively advocate their position. Commentators commonly note the resulting imbalance in proceeding son fundamentally important public policies. See e.g.,

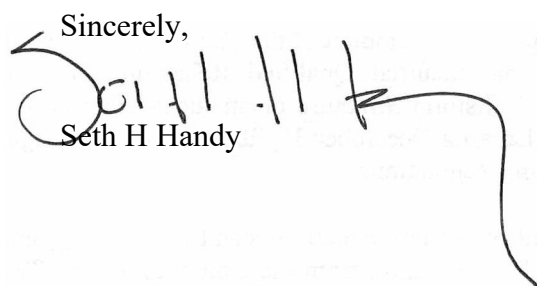
*Beyond Utility 2.0 to Energy Democracy*, The Institute for Self-Reliance (Dec. 9, 2014), p. 20-21 (<https://ilsr.org/articles/report-energy-democracy/>) (“utilities can use their customer revenue to finance their perspective before the Public Utilities Commission while independent intervenors typically have to self--finance several thousand dollars for their intervention. If independent intervenors do receive compensation for their work, it’s always after the fact.”)

*Upcharge: Hidden Cost of Utility Monopoly Power* (May 30, 2024), pp. 40- 48 (<https://ilsr.org/articles/report-upcharge-electric-utility-monopoly/>) (“Utilities exercise their political power in a vicious cycle that often includes deceptive, unethical, and outright illegal political activity. Unlike a typical business, their publicly-granted franchise allows them to accumulate political power by spending money collected from captive customers.”)

H5815 provides a start at leveling the playing field for advocacy on critically important public policy issues like real energy reform. Please pass it.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,

  
Seth H Handy