

Consumer counsel backs PURA, towns

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Office of Consumer Counsel The state's advocate for utility ratepayers. It works to ensure just and reasonable rates and reliable utility service for customers of Connecticut's electric, gas, telephone, and water utilities and reasonable protections for cable television customers.

Area towns have a new ally in their work to remedy what they think is [Connecticut Light & Power Company's](#) perpetual state of unreadiness when it comes to restoring power after big storms.

Elin Swanson Katz, the state's consumer counsel, wrote this week to the [Public Utilities Regulatory Agency](#) to support the towns' call for fast action to improve CL&P's response to storms

"PURA can help on this," Katz said Thursday. "I know it can."

"It's very nice," said Newtown First Selectman Pat Llodra, of Katz's support. "We're very happy to have it.

Her office represents the voice of the consumer."

Llodra, along with her counterparts in Redding, Ridgefield and Wilton, has become an intervenor in PURA's investigation into what CL&P did and didn't do after Tropical Storm Irene in August and the October nor'easter. Those storms left record numbers of people without power, some for a week or more. Ridgefield and Redding each lost almost 100 percent of their power.

The weather after Irene was summer-like. After the nor'easter, it was sunny and in the 50s. What the town officials fear is a week-long outage in midwinter.

"The suffering would be much worse," Ridgefield First Selectman Rudy Marconi said Thursday. "We'll be talking about loss of life."

In the storms' wakes, there have been two state investigations into why the power was out for so many people for so long, and many proposals set before both the [General Assembly](#) and Gov. [Dannel P. Malloy](#).

But the town leaders' position, echoed by Katz, is that there are steps the CL&P needs to take immediately to improve its response to storms and that PURA can require the utility to take those steps.

In her letter to PURA, Katz listed seven things CL&P could do, including securing additional tree crews before a storm, ensuring that CL&P has enough personnel to deal with emergencies, strengthening the relationship between the towns and CL&P liaisons, and better integrating the work done by CL&P crews and town crews.

"There are long-term changes being requested and it's appropriate that PURA to take their time to consider them," Katz said. "But these are short-term changes." Katz said it is her understanding that CL&P has already begun to make some of these changes.

CL&P spokesman [Mitch Gross](#) said he could not comment on the PURA investigation into the utility's storm response because it is ongoing.

"We're cooperating fully," Gross said. "We're providing them with reams of information."

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