

To: The Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Re: Pipeline Safety in the Merrimack Valley: Incident Prevention and Response
Date: November 20, 2018

I appreciate this opportunity to testify before you today representing those men and women of the fire service who responded to the catastrophic natural gas incident that occurred at approximately 4:18 pm on September 13, 2018. This event has been identified as the worst natural gas disaster to ever occur in the history of the United States.

I must state that the time afforded for me to speak today will not even scratch the surface with regards to the specifics of this event or the challenges we have been confronted with and are still confronted with as we navigate through the recovery phase of the operation.

The events that led up to the disaster would have never occurred if there were technological stop gap measures on the pipeline in place by Columbia Gas. Those measures would have prevented what has been reported to be up to seventy four (74) pounds of pressure introduced into the gas line that took well over one (1) hour by Columbia Gas employees and/or subcontractors to shut down.

To date, it remains incomprehensible that Columbia Gas which is a subsidiary of the multibillion dollar conglomerate known as NiSource is involved in an industry that is so dangerous to our communities, but had no ability to stop the flow of natural gas to its infrastructure that supplies the three communities of Lawrence, North Andover, and Andover.

The fire service in all three communities rely heavily upon usually assist one another in the mitigation of any type of emergency incident when they occur. With this incident all three fire departments found themselves competing for the same resources to assist in the emergency responses which included:

- 141 Fires
- 5 Building Explosions
- 1 Death
- 3 Civilians Seriously Injured
- 7 Firefighter injuries

911 calls for assistance at the initial point of the incident overwhelmed all available fire/rescue resources in the three affected communities within minutes. All off duty fire/rescue personnel were requested to report back into work. One hundred and fifty (150) off-duty firefighters from the three communities immediately answered the call.

The 911 Telecommunicators in the communities dispatch centers were also overwhelmed immediately by the deluge of calls from the affected residents. In the first eight hours after the initial natural gas line over pressurization occurred, the Lawrence, North Andover, Andover and mutual aid assets responded to over three hundred and seventy five (375) calls for assistance.

Firefighter safety was drastically minimized during the height of this incident as a result of the immediate lack of available resources. There are many instances on record where only one piece of apparatus with only three firefighters on board responded to a building fire. A normal initial response to these types of incidents would include three (3) engines, an aerial ladder and Command Staff totaling

fifteen (15) to seventeen (17) firefighters. There were many reports of fire personnel passing by structure fires as they responded to a structure fire at an address they had been originally dispatched to.

There are also many reports of firefighters exiting homes after extinguishing a fire and being met by frantic neighbors that their home is on fire also.

Mutual aid was immediately requested to respond to all affected communities as well. That system was overwhelmed to a point that a request to the State of Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency was made to activate the statewide fire mobilization plan, which allowed for several task forces of personnel, engine and ladder companies and ambulances to respond to assist with the disaster. The fire mobilization plan brought in the following additional personnel and equipment assets from as far away as York, ME., Nashua, NH and communities as far away as Western Massachusetts:

- 18 Additional Engine Companies
- 6 Additional Ladder Companies
- 9 Additional Chief Officers
- 56 Additional Ambulances
- 80 Additional Fire Suppression Personnel per 12 hour Operational Period

These additional assets were rotated every twelve hours to ensure firefighter safety was paramount and those asset numbers were maintained until Monday September 16, 2018.

Many Commonwealth of Massachusetts and Federal agencies assisted with the initial responses, investigations, mitigation and still are operating as part of the recovery phase of the operation such as the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services, Fire Marshal's Office, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, National Transportation Safety Board, Federal Bureau of Investigations and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

There are many lessons to be learned by this event. We within the fire service, are willing to work with those at the state and federal level to assist in the writing of additional legislation to regulate the natural gas industry so that we may prevent anything to this magnitude to ever occur again within our country.

All of the aforementioned agencies assistance has been immeasurable and we greatly appreciate the seamless methodology of their approach and response to all of our requests to ensure that the citizens we serve maintained a high level of safety. Their compassion and caring in an effort to meet all of the community's needs and our citizens has been nothing short of astounding.

In closing, on behalf of Fire Chief Brian Moriarty, Fire Chief William McCarthy and myself, I would like to thank all of those who have assisted us throughout this ordeal to date and those who continue to assist us with the recovery process. Most importantly we would like to thank those who reside in our communities for their patience throughout this event and the outpouring of support we have received.

Respectfully submitted,

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