

Ensuring Fairness and Transparency in Connecticut's Public Utilities: The Case for HB 5229

By 

Connecticut's Utility Crisis: Transparency, Regulation, and Efficiency

Connecticut's public utility sector faces critical issues of transparency, regulatory oversight, and energy efficiency mismanagement. Currently, utility companies are not required to comply with Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests¹, limiting public access to crucial information about rate changes, operational decisions, and customer service policies. Additionally, these companies impose unjustified fees on consumers for accessing certain information, increasing financial burdens².

The Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA), responsible for overseeing utility companies, lacks both technical expertise and sufficient staffing. Employees without proper qualifications make decisions that affect millions of consumers³, while slow vacancy-filling processes cause delays in critical regulatory actions⁴. Furthermore, energy efficiency programs intended to reduce carbon emissions and lower costs often operate on a profit-driven model, failing to prioritize the needs of consumers⁵.

¹ Gaudiosi J. (2024, September). *Freedom of Information*. CT.gov. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://portal.ct.gov/PURA/Consumer-Services/Freedom-of-Information>

² Burford, T. (2019, October 21). *The Obscure Charges that Utility Companies Add to Your Bills*. ProPublica. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from <https://www.propublica.org/article/the-obscure-charges-that-utility-companies-add-to-your-bills>

³ Camean, J.F. (2025, February 17). *Opinion: CT Has Failed at Utility Regulation*. CT Mirror. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://ctmirror.org/2025/02/17/ct-has-failed-at-utility-regulation/>

⁴ Turmelle, L. (2024, July 30). *CT PURA Positions Go Unfilled, Sparking Political Debate*. CT Insider. Retrieved February 1, 2025, from <https://www.ctinsider.com/business/article/ct-pura-utilities-commissioners-political-19604509.php>

⁵ Specian, M. (2021, December 2). *Utilities Need to Revamp Energy-Saving Efforts to Meet Climate Goals*. American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from <https://www.aceee.org/blog-post/2021/12/utilities-need-revamp-their-energy-saving-efforts-meet-climate-goals>

Why Reform Is Necessary: The Data Speaks

- **Transparency Concerns:** A report by Marc E. Finch (2025) revealed that PURA's chair secretly issued thousands of decisions under a subordinate's name⁶, including a \$70 million rate increase, demonstrating a clear lack of oversight⁷.
- **Energy Efficiency Failures:** Despite the Global Warming Solutions Act's goal of a 45% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030⁸, Connecticut's emissions increased by 2.7% from 2017 to 2018, indicating the inefficacy of current energy policies⁹.
- **Consumer Trust in Decline:** Research by Christine Horne (2022) found that consumers increasingly distrust utility companies due to poor customer service, rising costs, and risk mismanagement¹⁰.
- **Regulatory Shortcomings:** Reports on public utility governance highlight how PURA's structure does not align with effective corporate governance models, leaving gaps in oversight and policy implementation¹¹.

⁶ Finch, M. (2025, January 5). *The Authority: PURA Chair Secretly Issues Decisions Under Secretary's Name*. CT Inside Investigator. Retrieved February, 22, 2025, from <https://insideinvestigator.org/the-authority-pura-chair-secretly-issues-decisions-under-secretarys-name/>

⁷ Lurmelle, T. (2025, February 4). *Eversource and Avangrid File Lawsuit Against Connecticut's PURA*. CT Insider. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from <https://www.ctinsider.com/business/article/ct-eversource-avangrid-sue-pura-20066169.php>

⁸ *Connecticut Legislation Executive Orders on Climate*. (n.d.). CT.gov. Retrieved February 2, 2025, from <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Climate-Change/Connecticut-Legislation--Executive-Orders-on-Climate>

⁹ Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. (2021, September 7). *CT Not on Track to Meet Statutory Emissions Targets, New Greenhouse Gas Inventory Finds*. Retrieved February 22, 2025, from <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/news-releases/news-releases---2021/ct-not-on-track-to-meet-statutory-emissions-targets---new-greenhouse-gas-inventory-finds>

¹⁰ Horne, C. (2022). *California Consumers' Beliefs and Trust in Electric Utilities*. Sage Journals. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/23780231221105708>

¹¹ Ciulla, J. (2021, July 12). *The Untapped Potential of Public Utility Commissions*. RMI. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from <https://rmi.org/the-untapped-potential-of-public-utility-commissions/>

Policy Solutions

A recent review of state-level energy policies found that increased transparency and regulatory oversight led to greater consumer trust¹² and improved efficiency outcomes¹³. In states where public utility communications were made subject to Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) regulations, consumer advocacy groups reported increased participation in utility decision-making. Similarly, regulatory bodies with stricter professional requirements for members demonstrated faster response times to energy crises and more effective policy implementation¹⁴. These findings highlight the necessity of comprehensive reforms in Connecticut's utility governance and energy efficiency programs.

Utility reform policies have been implemented across the United States in states like Minnesota, Maryland, Virginia, and Colorado, and in cities such as Austin (TX), Seattle (WA), and Boston (MA), where transparency mandates, consumer protections, and energy efficiency measures have yielded positive economic and environmental outcomes. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) compiles and tracks these energy-related policy developments across all states.

¹² Grimmelhuijsen, S. (2024, January). *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, Volume 34, Issue 1 (pp 136-149). Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://doi.org/10/1093/jopart/muad010>

¹³ Shea, D. (2023, April 7). *Performance-Based Regulation: Harmonizing Electric Utility Priorities and State Policy*. NCSL. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from <https://www.ncsl.org/energy/performance-based-regulation-harmonizing-electric-utility-priorities-and-state-policy>

¹⁴ Makaryan, R. (2010). *Improving Regulatory Agency Efficiency and Effectiveness*. University of Texas at Austin. Retrieved February 2, 2025, from https://www.beg.utexas.edu/files/energyecon/electric-power/CEE%20Research%20Note_Regulatory%20Efficiency%20and%20Effectiveness.pdf

Several states have successfully implemented policies similar to HB 5229, demonstrating its viability in transparency, energy efficiency, and consumer protection.

In Minnesota, the Energy Conservation and Optimization Act (HF 164)¹⁵ set higher energy savings targets, positioning the state among the top in energy efficiency efforts. Similarly, Maryland's HB 505 banned utilities from using ratepayer funds for lobbying, protecting consumers from subsidizing corporate interests¹⁶.

Virginia's Clean Economy Act (HB 1526 & SB 851) mandates 100% renewable electricity by 2045, creating thousands of clean energy jobs while cutting emissions¹⁷. Colorado's HB 21-1105 introduced income-based efficiency programs, reducing energy costs for low-income households¹⁸.

These policies show that HB 5229 aligns with proven strategies for greater transparency, energy efficiency, and consumer protections, setting Connecticut on a path toward more equitable and effective utility regulation.

¹⁵ (2023). *ECO- Energy Conservation and Optimization*. (n.d.). Minnesota.gov. Retrieved February 22, 2025, from <https://mn.gov/commerce/energy/conserving-energy/eco/>

¹⁶ Scarr, E. (2024, February 22). *Consumer and Environmental Advocates Call on Maryland Legislature to Pass Legislation to Restrict How Utility Companies Can Spend Ratepayer Money*. Maryland PIRG. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://pirg.org/maryland/media-center/consumer-and-environmental-advocates-call-on-maryland-legislature-to-pass-legislation-to-restrict-how-utility-companies-can-spend-ratepayer-money/>

¹⁷ (2020). *The Clean Economy Act Benefits All Virginians*. SouthernEnvironment.org. Retrieved February 2, 2025, from https://www.southernenvironment.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/VCEA_Factsheet_0124_F.pdf

¹⁸ Kennedy. (2021). *Concerning Utility Consumers' Financial Contributions for Low-Income Utility Assistance*. Colorado.gov. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from https://leg.colorado.gov/sites/default/files/2021a_1105_signed.pdf

Other approaches involve policy and regulatory instruments such as:

- Expanding FOIA requirements to cover all public utility communications, ensuring that decisions affecting ratepayers are accessible and transparent¹⁹.
- Prohibiting utility companies from imposing additional fees on consumers for accessing their own billing and usage data, preventing unfair financial burdens.
- Mandating minimum professional qualifications for Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (PURA) employees, ensuring decision-makers possess expertise in economics, engineering, law, and consumer advocacy.
- Requiring timely appointment of PURA vacancies, reducing regulatory delays and inefficiencies that impact consumers.
- Transferring management of energy efficiency programs to nonprofit entities, prioritizing consumer interests over profit-driven models²⁰.

These measures would ensure greater accountability, fairer consumer protections, and improved energy efficiency outcomes for Connecticut's residents.

¹⁹ Douglas, S. (2016, February). *Transparency and Public Value- Analyzing the Transparency Practice and Value Creation of Public Utilities*. Research Gate. Retrieved February 7, 2025, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/295094834_Transparency_and_Public_Value-Analyzing_the_Transparency_Practices_and_Value_Creation_of_Public_Uilities

²⁰ Grayer, A. (2015, June). *Corruption: Classification and Analysis*, Volume 34, Issue 2, pp. 87-96. Oxford Academic. Retrieved February 28, 2025, from <https://academic.oup.com/policyandsociety/article/34/2/87/6401359>

Conclusion: Why HB 5229 is the Best Path Forward

The lack of transparency, regulatory inefficiency, and profit-driven energy programs in Connecticut's utility sector demand urgent action. HB 5229 provides a comprehensive, consumer-focused solution, drawing from successful models in other states to ensure fairness, efficiency, and public accountability.

We urge policymakers to support HB 5229 to protect consumers, ensure ethical utility practices, and advance Connecticut's clean energy future.

Contact Information

Please reach out to me with any and all questions.

