



Legislation Text

File #: Res 1420-2020, **Version:** *

Res. No. 1420

Resolution calling upon Consolidated Edison to increase resources dedicated to service restoration on a borough by borough basis and create a report of the most vulnerable utility infrastructure in each borough.

By Council Members Vallone, Holden and Adams

Whereas, Consolidated Edison (Con Edison) has a monopoly over the distribution of electricity in New York City; and

Whereas, Therefore, New York City residents have little to no choice but to be bound to Con Edison; and

Whereas, New Yorkers pay nearly 50 percent more for their electricity than the average national price; and

Whereas, However, they still face long hot summers with the specter of power outages and little confidence that, in the event of a blackout, power will be restored quickly; and

Whereas, Certain boroughs and neighborhoods in New York City are particularly susceptible to power outages; and

Whereas, For example, in Queens, the majority of power lines run above-ground, which are vulnerable to downed trees and storm damage; and

Whereas, Staten Island has the second-most overhead power lines in New York, after Queens, and there are no overhead lines in Manhattan; and

Whereas, It was not surprising then that when the most recent tropical storm, Isaias, hit New York City in early August 2020, residents in Queens and Staten Island were the hardest hit by power outages; and

Whereas, In Staten Island, 36,000 customers faced outages after Tropical Storm Isaias; and

Whereas, In Queens, meanwhile, at the peak of the outage, 73,000 customers lost power and 10,000 were still without power five days after the storm hit; and

Whereas, Compounding these power outages, some neighborhoods in Queens have also faced some of the highest cases of COVID-19, during this pandemic; and

Whereas, The overlap of power outages hitting the most vulnerable is not exclusive to this event, nor this borough; and

Whereas, For instance, in 2019, when a heatwave hit New York City, residents across the boroughs faced power outages; and

Whereas, Just as the temperatures and humidity were hitting their peaks, customers in Flushing and Richmond Hill in Queens, and various neighborhoods in Brooklyn, lost power; and

Whereas, Additionally, Con Edison cut power or reduced voltage for some customers in Brooklyn, claiming the utility needed to take this action in order to make repairs and prevent further outages; and

Whereas, These outages, deliberate and otherwise, came despite assurances from Con Edison's President, Tim Cawley, prior to the heatwave that the company was "ready for what the heat will bring"; and

Whereas, Importantly, residents in the neighborhoods that were left either without power or with reduced voltage, were also neighborhoods with some of the highest heat vulnerability indexes; and

Whereas, While many of New York's political leaders are fed-up with Con Edison's poor performance, it is clear that some boroughs are bearing more of the brunt than others; and

Whereas, Con Edison often touts its reliability performance against other national utilities; and

Whereas, However, as the New York State Department of Public Service notes, because Con Edison's network "includes many large, highly concentrated underground distribution networks [mainly in Manhattan]

that are generally less prone to interruptions than overhead systems, its interruption frequency is extremely low (better) compared with other utilities”; and

Whereas, Therefore, the Company’s reliability claims mask some of the important borough-to-borough differences; and

Whereas, The recent outages in Queens were not the first major blackouts for the borough; and

Whereas, In 2006, residents in the borough were left without power for eight days, making it one of the longest blackouts in the City’s history; and

Whereas, Investigations of this event found that Con Edison had failed to maintain its equipment and had under-reported the number of people affected; and

Whereas, Furthermore, although residents in Queens experienced a total of \$188 million in damages, Con Edison was criticized for offering a mere \$100 in compensation to impacted businesses; and

Whereas, Despite ongoing promises from Company leadership that lessons have been learned and that they are committed to investing in infrastructure upgrades to prevent further service disruptions, Con Edison is still unable to provide reliable service, equitably, to all of its New York City residents; and

Whereas, With heatwaves and storms predicted to increase, due to the impact of climate change, the City’s most vulnerable populations are at further risk for power outages; and

Whereas, Research has shown that race, age and poverty are all compounding factors in heat-related deaths, and yet neighborhoods with these populations continue to face the most frequent power outages; and

Whereas, Con Edison’s New York-wide performance data does not show the whole picture; and

Whereas, Without this information it is impossible to tell whether the utility is investing in the most vulnerable neighborhoods, or focusing solely on upgrading infrastructure in parts of the City that are already secure; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That Consolidated Edison increase resources dedicated to service restoration on a borough by

borough basis and create a report of the most vulnerable utility infrastructure in each borough.

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LMS