

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 14, 2018

The Honorable John Thune
Chairman
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Bill Nelson
Ranking Member
Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Thune and Ranking Member Nelson,

We write to request a hearing in the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee on the oversight and regulation of the nation's natural gas distribution system. On September 13, 2018, natural gas explosions caused approximately 60-80 fires in Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover, Massachusetts. More than twenty-five people were injured, and one person has been reported dead. Given the Commerce Committee's jurisdiction over both the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA), which regulates natural gas transmission and distribution lines, and the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), which investigates pipeline accidents, the Committee should hear from regulators and the distribution company to understand how this incident occurred and what must be done to ensure these types of dangerous accidents do not happen again.

These explosions in Andover, North Andover, and Lawrence, have been linked to natural gas distribution pipelines operated by the Columbia Gas of Massachusetts, a NiSource subsidiary. Earlier on September 13, Columbia Gas had announced activities to upgrade sections of its distribution lines in the area where the explosions occurred. Media reports and preliminary conversations with regulators indicate that the explosions may have been caused by over-pressurization of the pipeline system. Columbia Gas of Massachusetts also was responsible for a 2012 explosion in Springfield, Massachusetts, in which 18 people were injured.

We urge the Committee to call a hearing immediately with representatives from PHMSA, NTSB, and the natural gas distribution industry, including Columbia Gas of Massachusetts and NiSource, in order to examine whether regulators have adequate authority and resources to detect

and remedy violations, respond to natural gas accidents in a timely manner, and ensure better operating procedures for companies linked to repeated misconduct.

Thank you for your consideration of this request, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Edward J. Markey
U.S. Senator



Elizabeth Warren
U.S. Senator