

# OFFICE OF THE COUNTY LEGISLATURE

## COUNTY OF SUFFOLK

**Bridget Fleming**  
Second Legislative District

**Committee Member**  
Environment, Parks & Agriculture  
Health  
Public Safety  
Public Works, Transportation & Energy  
Veterans & Consumer Affairs  
Ways & Means



**Chair**, Gabreski Airport Community Advisory Board  
**Chair**, Renewable Energy Jobs Taskforce  
**Chair**, Transportation Working Group  
**Member**, Tick Control Advisory Committee

Legislative Commission on the Future of the Long Island Power Authority  
Commissioner Senator Kevin Thomas, Co-Chair  
Commissioner Assembly Member Fred W. Thiele, Jr., Co-Chair  
East End Communities Public Hearing  
Southampton Town Hall  
Southampton, New York

January 20, 2023

Comment submitted by Suffolk County Legislator Bridget Fleming, 2nd Legislative District

Dear Chair Thomas, Chair Thiele, and Members of the Commission:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the important work of the Commission. There is a refreshing level of commitment to public stakeholder input into the reform of our electric utility that has been demonstrated by the creation of the Commission and your work to date. This is good to see, particularly in light of LIPA's inexplicable decision to halt the recent options analysis mid-stream, and to renew the PSEG contract despite all its management failures and attempts to evade accountability. I trust the Commission will review the comments of those who participated in the options analysis process, as you continue to work toward accomplishing the goals of LIPA ratepayers, particularly with respect to the public option.

It is clearly now time to move away from the third-party management structure. It is time to decouple our utility from the constraints of its unique history, and instead bring it in line with best practices for utilities across the country and around the globe. There is a reason we are the only utility service territory in the country with such a governance structure. Its management has failed its 1.2 million consumers on Long Island and in Queens.

On Long Island, it is an ongoing challenge to maintain the fabric of our communities, and to keep young working people and innovative companies here in our region. To ensure a sustainable economy, we must tackle the high cost of doing business, including electric costs which are higher than in most parts of the country. We are also a coastal community, particularly vulnerable to the increasing impacts of climate change. We must move forward

with innovative, and cost-effective electricity production and transmission, not backward with a governance structure that has left Long Islanders in the dark.

The Suffolk Legislature in recent years has assisted The Nature Conservancy and Defenders of Wildlife in launching the Long Island Solar Map, to drive investment in mid to large-scale solar energy development, and produced a Community Choice Aggregation Task Force Report, filed in proceedings of the Department of Public Service to increase retail competition for electricity, to reduce costs and cut fossil fuel emissions. Bid packets are due next week for the third round of awards for major ocean wind projects, which will continue to cement Long Island's place in the history of global renewable energy supply. These are only examples of initiatives being explored by governments and private industry across Long Island that demonstrate the public's heightened concern for reliable, cost-effective electric power, that will reduce fossil fuel emissions, and have the potential of providing electricity that is less tied to rate pressure created by commodity markets.

At the same time, billions of dollars of support for forward-thinking projects will soon be available to our region, from New York's Environmental Bond Act, and the federal Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the CHIPS and Science Act, for infrastructure to build our economy, advance science, and reduce and mitigate climate change impacts. It is critically important that we complete reform of the governance of our electric utility, to ensure competent and effective implementation of innovative projects, to take Long Island into a future where we can not only protect our communities from the ravages of climate change impacts, but where we can become a model for the world, by meeting the aggressive targets of CLCPA.

Implementing a truly public power entity promises to achieve important goals that have evaded Long Island ratepayers under the third-party management structure. LIPA has confirmed that moving to a public utility will result in a savings of more than \$75 million dollars. Also critically important, the new structure must provide responsive, transparent communications with local stakeholders. This can be achieved by ensuring that governance of the utility is based here on Long Island, with a governing body that is selected locally and accountable primarily to Long Islanders. In addition, local oversight with the authority to demand transparency, accountability and corrective actions must be provided. I applaud the creation of the Advisory Committee, with its thorough and inclusive roster. I urge that their recommendations be explicitly considered.

I urge that certain aspects of the current governance be maintained. It is critical that the structure of the utility enable eligibility for FEMA and other federal and local government grant funding, allow for tax exempt debt, and remain free from the need to pay dividends. It is important to stay on track with the current gradual reduction of legacy debt. And in addition, the workers throughout the system must be protected in the transition, with particular

attention given to honoring workers' expectations regarding wages and working conditions, and maintaining bargained-for pension and benefit plans.

Thank you for your care and commitment as you pursue this important task. Under your guidance, LIPA has the potential to move away from the status quo and join utilities across the country in deploying a reliable and responsive public utility management structure that can transform the current energy system, to reduce the cost for ratepayers, protect workers, and animate and support investment in innovative power projects to reduce climate impacts and meet Long Island's ambitious and critically important environmental goals.

If I can provide further information, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,



**Bridget Fleming**

Suffolk County Legislator

Second Legislative District

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