

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 19, 2018

Stephen H. Bryant
President and Chief Operating Officer
Columbia Gas of Massachusetts
4 Technology Drive
Westborough, MA 01581

Dear Mr. Bryant,

Following the natural gas explosions in North Andover, Andover, and Lawrence, your company announced that Columbia Gas would donate \$10 million to the Greater Lawrence Disaster Relief Fund.¹ The company also announced the opening of two claims centers where residents could submit damage claims for reimbursement.² This is a good first step towards providing restitution and assistance to those who have been harmed by this disaster, but it is critical that Columbia Gas immediately commit whatever financial resources are necessary to ensure that every affected resident in this area has the resources they need to rebuild their lives now and is made economically whole.

Homes have been destroyed or damaged, and small businesses are losing income by the day. Families are going without heat or the ability to cook food, and individuals are recovering from serious injuries. Immediate robust financial assistance is imperative to ensure that residents have the resources they need to live in the immediate future and to rebuild their communities and lives over the long term.

Within a week of the 2010 gas explosion in San Bruno, California, Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) Company created the "Rebuild San Bruno Fund" and made up to \$100 million available for recovery efforts and community rebuilding.³ During the San Bruno incident, approximately

¹ John R. Ellement, *Columbia Gas donates \$10m to Merrimack Valley relief fund*, Boston Globe (Sept. 18, 2018), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2018/09/18/columbia-gas-donates-relief-fund-help-residents-lawrence-andover-and-north-andover/141LNcz56EEzKnCuiKK1KJ/story.html>.

² *Property Claims Centers Open Tuesday in Lawrence and Andover*, Columbia Gas of Massachusetts (Sept. 18, 2018), <https://www.columbiagasma.com/en/merrimack-valley-incident>.

³ *PG&E Establishes 'Rebuild San Bruno Fund'*, Pacific Gas and Electric Company (Sept. 13, 2010), https://www.pge.com/about/newsroom/newsreleases/20100913/pge_establishes_rebuild_san_bruno_fund.shtml

271 homes⁴ had to be evacuated and 38 were destroyed.⁵ The “Rebuild San Bruno Fund” made immediate disbursements of \$15,000, \$25,000, or \$50,000 per affected household, based on how badly each was damaged in the explosion. The company also set up a program to provide financial assistance to people working to repair their homes or sell them, and offered to purchase homes that were damaged or badly destroyed. These kinds of programs could help families in Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover who will be affected long-term by this incident and whose houses or businesses were significantly damaged.

In the Merrimack Valley, more than 8,000 people were displaced as the dozens of fires raged, and around 80 buildings were damaged or destroyed.⁶ Families are reeling, businesses are struggling, and neighborhoods still await answers. Residents need to know that they and their families will be able to weather whatever financial upheaval they have experienced in the immediate aftermath, as well as have the information that they need to plan for their futures. Columbia Gas should make available whatever financial resources are needed to make these communities whole.

We hope that Columbia Gas will look to other financial responses to disasters, including the PG&E response from the San Bruno incident, and improve its response to those affected in the Merrimack Valley. Should you have any questions about this letter, please contact Morgan Gray in Senator Markey’s office at 202-224-2742.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey
U.S. Senator


Elizabeth Warren
U.S. Senator

⁴ Paul Rogers, *More remains found in San Bruno fire; PG&E checking major pipelines for flaws*, The Mercury News (Sept. 11, 2010), <https://www.mercurynews.com/2010/09/11/more-remains-found-in-san-bruno-fire-pge-checking-major-pipelines-for-flaws>.

⁵ Katharine Q. Seelye and Farah Stockman, *After Massachusetts Gas Explosions, Weary Residents Ask, What Happened?*, New York Times (Sept. 14, 2018), <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/14/us/massachusetts-gas-explosions-fires.html>.

⁶ Nate Raymond, *Lawsuit targets Massachusetts utility over deadly gas explosions*, Reuters (Sept. 18, 2018), <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-massachusetts-explosions/lawsuit-targets-massachusetts-utility-over-deadly-gas-explosions-idUSKCN1LY2QX>.