



**MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND**

**OFFICE OF COUNCILMEMBER
ROGER BERLINER**

July 29, 2010

Mr. Douglas R.M. Nazarian
Chairman
Maryland Public Service Commission
45 Calvert Street
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We are writing to ask the Commission to open an investigation into the reliability of electricity in Pepco's Montgomery County's service territory. Our residents and businesses have suffered an unacceptable number and duration of outages for many years, outages that have harmed public health, public safety and the County's economy. As a distribution-only utility, the quality and reliability of Pepco's service is exclusively within your authority. We ask you to invoke that authority to ensure our citizens of acceptable levels of reliability.

We recognize that severe storms like the most recent one to ravage our community, as well as the blizzards this past winter are occurrences of nature that can not be blamed on the utility. However, the extreme results this storm produced highlighted the underlying reality that the distribution system in Montgomery County is extremely vulnerable. Even on cloudless, idyllic days, our residents have experienced unexplained outages. And this happens all too often leading us to ask whether or not Pepco has sufficient in-house staff to maintain its infrastructure.

We also recognize that our county and our citizens value our tree canopy, and that trees are often blamed for outages. But that simplistic response begs the question – what are the full range of measures necessary to bring our system to a level of reliability that meets the legitimate needs of our community, including measures that mitigate the impact of trees? Pepco officials told our Council Tuesday that they have investigated undergrounding those portions of the system that have experienced repeated outages.

100 MARYLAND AVENUE • ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND 20850
240/777-7828 • TTY 240/777-7914 • FAX 240/777-7989
Councilmember.berliner@montgomerycountymd.gov
www.montgomerycountymd.gov

We believe such measures, and others that could increase reliability, require a thorough investigation by your Commission. While it is often said that undergrounding and other measures are expensive, the cost to our county and to the state of these repeated outages is also very large – economically and otherwise.

More broadly, we believe that every outage ought to be reported to your Commission, with a report on its causes, the length of time a customer was without power, and the measures that Pepco is taking to ensure that the cause of the outage is rectified. We also suggest that the Commission adopt minimum reliability standards so that Pepco can be held accountable – assuming that you provide Pepco the resources that it needs to significantly improve the system.

And finally, we strongly suggest that you ensure, to the maximum extent practicable, there are human beings answering the phones when there are outages. When a customer loses power, getting a recorded message, often with misleading information, is infuriating. Residents deserve accurate information regarding restoration efforts and a good faith estimate as to when power will be restored. In addition, Pepco should be required to use the best technology and mapping systems available so that customers can avail themselves of real time, accurate information online.

Mr. Chairman, we urge you to act promptly on this request and to set in motion a collaborative process that will lead to a substantial improvement in the reliability of PEPSCO's system.

Sincerely,

Roger Berliner
Lead for Energy and Environment
Councilmember, District 1

Nancy Floreen
Council President
Councilmember, At-Large

Valerie Ervin
Council Vice President
Councilmember, District 5

Phil Andrews
Councilmember, District 3

Marc Elrich
Councilmember, At-Large

Mike Knapp
Councilmember, District 2

George Leventhal
Councilmember, At-Large

Nancy Navarro
Councilmember, At-Large

Duchy Trachtenberg
Councilmember, At-Large

CC: Governor Martin O'Malley
Lieutenant Governor Anthony Brown
Thomas Graham
County Executive Ike Leggett
Timothy Firestine
Senator Brian Frosh
Senator Rob Garagiola
Senator Rich Madaleno
Delegate Al Carr
Delegate Kathleen Dumais
Delegate Brian Feldman
Delegate Bill Frick
Delegate Susan Lee
Delegate Anna Sol Gutierrez
Delegate Jeff Waldstreicher