

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

November 15, 2018

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to support the Commonwealth of Massachusetts's request for a Major Disaster Declaration following the Merrimack Valley natural gas explosions in September 2018. This disaster impacted thousands of residents and businesses in the communities of Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover and has placed a significant hardship on the region.

On September 13, 2018, a pipeline operated by Columbia Gas became over-pressurized, causing three explosions, triggering dozens of structure fires, and leaving at least 19 homes permanently uninhabitable. Thousands of residents in these communities were forced to immediately evacuate. The disaster injured 25 people, including first responders, and killed one person – an 18-year-old named Leonel Rondon. Residents were not allowed to return to their homes for several days, and the region remains without gas service. According to Columbia Gas over 7,700 individuals have required alternative housing during the recovery period, including 2,683 children.¹

That same day, a Unified Command Center was established in the City of Lawrence to coordinate emergency response activities across the three communities. Emergency teams immediately began working around the clock to ensure safe conditions, including firefighters from 180 different municipalities and more than 660 law enforcement personnel from 140 different police departments.² Local organizations including the American Red Cross and the Salvation Army also assisted residents by serving more than 9,500 meals and providing temporary shelter until residents could safely return home.

Governor Charlie Baker declared a State of Emergency on September 14th, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Massachusetts Office of Public Safety and Inspections (OPSI), Massachusetts Department of Fire Services, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA), and local building inspectors began conducting damage

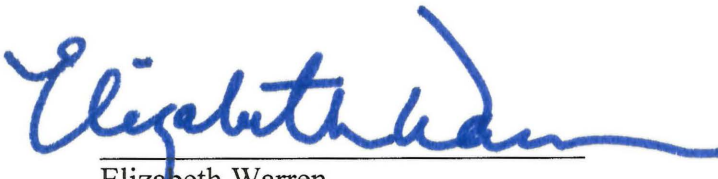
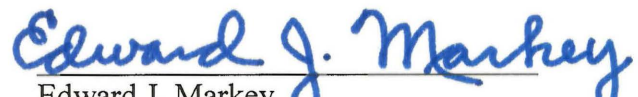
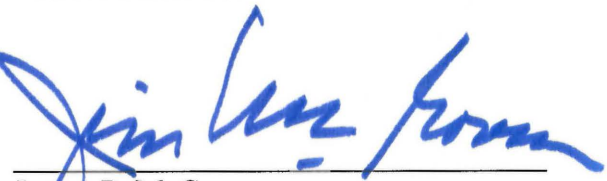
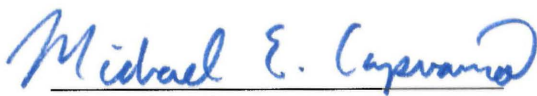
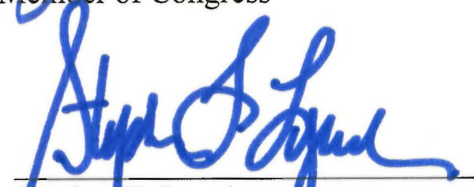
¹ Columbia Gas, "Daily Briefing," November 13, 2018

² Letter from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Office of the Governor to President Donald Trump, November 9, 2018

assessments of impacted structures. After the areas were determined to be safe, Governor Baker directed the establishment of an integrated Recovery Team, which was comprised of local and state officials; representatives of Columbia Gas and its parent company NiSource; and other private sector companies involved with restoration and recovery efforts. The Recovery Team determined that full restoration of the residential units and businesses would not be complete until November 19, 2018 and would require the full replacement of 48 miles of pipeline and the assessment and possible replacement of 5,086 service lines and the gas meters, lines, boilers, and furnaces of 7,300 residential units and 685 businesses.³ However, at the end of October, Columbia Gas announced it would not be able to meet the November deadline, delaying final restoration by nearly a month to December 16, 2018. To date, local, regional, and state entities who participated in these emergency response efforts have spent \$2.7 million.⁴

These communities and the Commonwealth have incurred significant disaster response and recovery costs as a result of the short- and long-term problems associated with the Columbia Gas pipeline over-pressurization. Federal assistance is critically needed to help the Commonwealth repair and replace pipeline and gas infrastructure, homes, and businesses that were damaged or destroyed by the gas explosions and gas service disruptions. We respectfully urge your timely approval of this request and we thank you in advance for your fair and full consideration.

Sincerely,

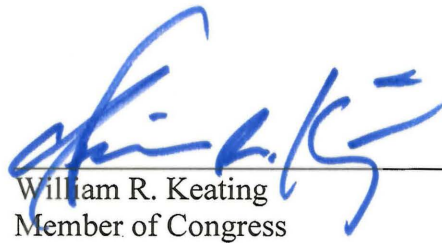

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Edward J. Markey
United States Senator
Richard E. Neal
Member of Congress
James P. McGovern
Member of Congress
Michael E. Capuano
Member of Congress
Stephen F. Lynch
Member of Congress

³ *Ibid*

⁴ *Ibid*



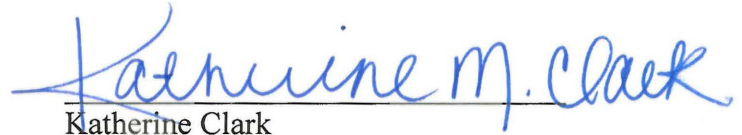
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Member of Congress



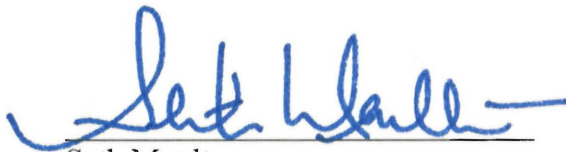
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