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Committee on Transportation and Public Utilities Hearing

City Hall

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Council Member Green and Committee on Transportation and Public Utilities, thank you for welcoming POWER to testify today on the future of PGW. As Executive Director of POWER I am all too aware of the disastrous juncture of climate crisis and extreme inequality. The city's goal of an 80% reduction in carbon pollution by 2050 does not address the urgency of this time. Every decision made by each and every leader in this age must consider both people and planet. Transitioning PGW into a renewable energy future is an opportunity to face the great moral issues of the day: how can we build racial and economic justice on a livable planet? I will share with you some essential points for the journey ahead.

1. PGW is a public utility. It is ours, held collectively by the residents of Philadelphia. This means PGW has a duty to be responsive to the public it serves. It also means that City Council, as a governing body, is uniquely positioned to transition away from fossil fuels with the interests of residents, the labor force, and our environment as paramount. We do not have to cater to private shareholders. We can be bold and just! We must create solutions that end energy poverty, protect the health of city residents, and build a stronger workforce, with living wage jobs. **We cannot let these three issues be pitted against each other.** The question is not "Jobs versus Health" or "Affordability versus Climate Stability." A just transition moves us towards a Green Economy that prioritizes green jobs, safe clean energy and stable communities. The transition must be a public one; if it is private we lose accountability and control.
2. The City must commit to budgeting resources for a LABOR and COMMUNITY-LED study that transitions PGW off of fossil-fuels towards renewable energy.
  - a. This means that labor unions, environmental justice, faith, and grassroots community-based organizations serve on a commission that outlines the needs of all Philadelphians, inform the process for data collection and participatory research, and advise on study findings.



b. The transition must maintain a strong labor force and prioritize the most impacted residents in a transition away from fossil fuels. For example, a transition study should proceed with the following goals in mind:

- *Ensure energy affordability.* No one should have to pay more than 6% of their income towards energy (heating, hot water, cooling, and electricity). Therefore a transition must find ways for all Philadelphians to have sufficient heat and hot water in their homes within this cap;
- *The poor should not bear the burden of transition.* Tenants and low-income residents cannot be unfairly burdened by transition costs due to fuel-switching;
- *Labor should shape the transition, not lose out.* This means PGW retirees' pensions are guaranteed and PGW workers who are displaced by the transition are able to obtain employment for the same salary and with the same benefits doing work that is needed to provide renewable heat.
- *We do not redline workers.* Would-be workers who have been excluded from the fossil fuel industry because of poverty, racial bias and lack of education and training are intentionally prepared for inclusion in the green economy.
- *Workers are public employees.* Workers who are employed in all facets of the transition to renewable heat and in maintaining the new equipment and infrastructure are:
  - Public employees
  - Paid a living wage, with good benefits
  - Welcome to join a union and engage in collective bargaining

3. The City must put a moratorium on any new fossil fuel infrastructure (including new gas lines). We should intentionally assess PGW's infrastructure and identify what gas main lines require immediate repair for the health of a neighborhood and where we can begin the transition into renewables (such as building out infrastructure for district heating or electric heat pump systems). We cannot afford to invest in a 50 year gas pipeline vision where we will be stuck with stranded assets on the public's dime. . We need to be smarter and more strategic in our energy planning so by 2050 we are thriving with a public utility that contributes to safe, clean energy; good green jobs and climate stability.

I urge you today, leaders of our city, to take a bold stand for the Great Turning toward a renewable energy economy that leaves no Philadelphian behind. All the technology we



need is available. We need to commit ourselves to using it. Right now with the decision about PGW's future, we have the opportunity to turn away from false solutions. It is a false solution to say we can only have jobs if we are willing to settle for a dirty fossil fuel energy system that causes more severe storms, flooding and extreme weather; that exacerbates insecurities our residents already face in housing, food, health and transportation. It is a false solution to say we can only have jobs if we are willing to endorse dirty fossil fuel energy systems downstream and upstream from our home. We urge you not to settle for these false solutions. For further resources we refer you to the People's Platform, forged by POWER and dozens of community, faith and labor partners; it is available at Alliance for a Just Philadelphia. We urge you to be champions of a rapid and just transition towards a green economy. Let's start right now as we plan for PGW's future.

Thank you.