



CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD

Fighting for Illinois Consumers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

June 24, 2024

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CUB: COM ED PUSHES FOR CUSTOMERS TO PAY MILLIONS TO FIX BOTCHED BILLING ‘UPGRADE’ THAT HAS CRIPPLED IL’S ACCLAIMED COMMUNITY SOLAR PROGRAM

After months of significant problems, CUB joins Community Solar companies, victimized customers to call on ComEd to promptly fix fiasco without forcing customers to pay for utility giant’s ineptitude

CHICAGO—With Commonwealth Edison’s botched billing system upgrade effectively blocking Illinois’ money-saving Community Solar program, the Citizens Utility Board (CUB) on Monday demanded that the utility giant finally resolve the months-long problems and abandon a ploy to force frustrated customers to pay nearly \$30 million to help fix the fiasco.

“This is unacceptable,” CUB Executive Director Sarah Moskowitz said. “ComEd needs to fix its billing mess now without charging customers a single penny more for its ineptitude. It’s ironic that ComEd, a company that touts itself as a clean energy champion, has bungled its billing system so severely that it has effectively blocked the Community Solar program, which has been a clean energy success story in Illinois. People depend on this program as a way to cut their bills and support clean energy—they deserve better from a utility whose parent company rakes in billions of dollars in profits.”

The billing system revamp was originally slated to be up and running Feb. 20. The supposed upgrade, which [ComEd said](#) was “designed to deliver an improved customer experience,” included a new look for bills and a new account number for each customer. But four months later, numerous problems persist and the error-prone system has effectively halted the [Community Solar](#) program, denying customers money-saving credits they are supposed to receive on their ComEd bills.

Community Solar, which was created under the 2016 Future Energy Jobs Act and got additional support from the 2021 Climate and Equitable Jobs Act, offers Illinois consumers the benefits of solar power without having to install panels at their homes. That makes the program an attractive and practical option for millions of apartment dwellers and people with shady roofs who in the past simply could never have considered solar power.

Under the program, ComEd customers who participate subscribe—at a discounted rate—to a portion of the energy output of a Community Solar provider’s large, offsite solar farm. Each month, those participants then get credits on their ComEd bills for the amount of power generated by their subscription at the solar farm. The program also has a component for lower-income households that guarantees savings.

However, ComEd’s billing revamp has sparked a long list of problems. For example, Community Solar credits that were supposed to help lower participants’ costs disappeared from ComEd bills—and sometimes the entire Community Solar section went missing. Other customers have seen only partial credits, or the credits were listed erroneously as a “previous balance due immediately.” As a result of the ComEd billing debacle, Community Solar is now stalled in Illinois, with Community Solar providers unable to send their monthly bills to customers.

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Making matters worse, ComEd in its latest rate-hike request (\$1.1 billion over four years) is trying to bill customers for fixing its blunders. As part of ComEd's second multi-year grid plan—the first was rejected by state regulators last December because the utility didn't do enough to prove that its plan would be affordable for customers—the company proposes spending another \$29.5 million on IT-related costs in response to the billing problems. A portion of the money would be recovered in the latest rate-hike request, with the rest recovered in decades to come, plus interest.

In testimony, CUB opposes that proposal on the grounds that ComEd shouldn't be charging customers for expenses caused by the company's own incompetence. “Charging ratepayers to redo a supposed billing system upgrade that ComEd botched is simply adding insult to injury,” Moskowitz said.

Community solar providers have complained of other problems, including:

- Lack of access to fully functioning online tools with important customer information that helps the sign-up process go smoothly.
- An online portal that has been plagued with glitches and actually crashed for three months, making it difficult to enroll new participants and update the accounts of current participants in Community Solar.
- Customer confusion over the new billing system's creation of a “Choice ID” –in addition to the traditional account number—for Community Solar customers. (Some customers reported having multiple Choice ID numbers.)
- Customer service agents who provide inaccurate information—including that the utility is unaware of the issue and cannot help and that Community Solar companies are to blame.

CUB demands that ComEd take several actions:

- promptly fix the billing fiasco;
- reimburse Community Solar customers for the bill credits they have been denied this year;
- spare customers any headaches (late fees, disconnections) for problems caused by billing system blunders;
- cease any attempt to charge customers for any expenses related to correcting its flawed billing system.

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More detail on Illinois' Community Solar program:

Under the program, participants subscribe to a portion of the energy output of a Community Solar provider's large, offsite solar farm. Each month, participants pay that provider for the amount of electricity generated by their subscription, minus a discount (typically providers in Illinois offer 10-15 percent). The provider then reports the output of the subscription to ComEd, which adds credits to its electric bill equal to that output. (For example, if a participant's solar credits are worth \$100 of electricity and a provider offers a 15 percent discount, the participant would save \$100 on their ComEd bill and only pay the community solar provider \$85.)

The Citizens Utility Board (CUB) is celebrating its 40th anniversary as Illinois' leading nonprofit utility watchdog group. Created by the Illinois Legislature, CUB opened its doors in 1984 to represent the interests of residential and small-business utility customers. Since then, CUB has saved consumers more than \$20 billion by helping to block rate hikes and secure refunds. For more information, call CUB's Consumer Hotline at **1-800-669-5556** or visit CUB's award-winning website, www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org.