



**CITIZENS UTILITY BOARD**  
Fighting for Illinois Consumers

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**DAY OF ACTION: CONSUMER ADVOCATES URGE OFFICIALS TO SAY NO TO PEOPLES GAS' \$402M RATE HIKE, YES TO CLEAN & AFFORDABLE BUILDINGS ORDINANCE**

Members of the Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition (ICJC) on Thursday flooded an Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) meeting and later held a rally outside City Hall to call for cheaper, cleaner ways to heat Chicago homes.

The day of action came shortly after the utility filed new numbers with the ICC concerning customer debt. In September, before many people turn on the heat, between 33% and 46% of households in the following neighborhoods were in debt with Peoples Gas: Englewood, West Garfield Park, South Shore, Chatham, Auburn Gresham, Woodlawn, South Austin, Roseland, North Kenwood and Grand Crossing. The average debt ranges from \$530 to \$963 per household.

Wearing t-shirts that proclaimed “Chicagoans Deserve Clean and Affordable Heat,” advocates filled the room (and an overflow room) at the regular open meeting of the ICC Thursday. They showed their opposition to Peoples Gas pushing for the highest gas rate hike in Illinois history—\$402 million—despite the fact that the company has made six straight years of record profits. Meanwhile, Chicagoans already pay an average of about \$50 to Peoples Gas every month before they even turn on their gas.

The ICC, a five-member board appointed by Gov. JB Pritzker, will make a final decision on the rate hike by the end of November. Earlier this month, an administrative law judge released a draft decision that would lower the rate hike by around \$50 million. Advocates and community members urged the ICC to do more to lower the rate hike, reduce fixed monthly charges, reform the Peoples Gas pipe-replacement program, and rein in wasteful spending going forward.

Later, the group moved across the street for a rally calling on Mayor Brandon Johnson and the Chicago City Council to pass a Clean and Affordable Buildings Ordinance (CABO), which would require new buildings to be heated by electricity, not dirty, expensive gas.

Chicago has been suffering through a heating-affordability crisis in recent years, marked by rapidly rising gas bills to pay for Peoples Gas' behind-schedule and over-budget pipeline replacement program. Customers have paid a high price for the utility's mismanagement: In September, about one in five customers were more than 30 days behind on their bills by a total of \$91.8 million. That's even worse than ComEd, which has about five times as many customers.

A poll over the summer showed Chicagoans against the Peoples Gas rate hike 61%-32%, with Black and Brown Chicagoans most vehemently opposed (71% of Black, 66% of Latino Chicagoans). The concern about Peoples Gas bills is so severe that the Clean Jobs Coalition announced in August that it had launched a campaign to pass a Clean and Affordable Buildings Ordinance (CABO).

The ordinance would be the first step in a long-term, equitable plan to move to cheaper, healthier ways to heat homes. It would set emissions standards to ensure new Chicago buildings are built all-electric, and commit the City to develop a plan for existing large buildings to reduce their pollution and cost to consumers.

As winter approached, consumer advocates gathered on Thursday to push for a clean, affordable energy future. The following are statements from people who spoke at the ICC or the City Hall rally.

- Rev. Veronica Johnson, a Southside pastor, Outreach Director for Faith in Place and a Peoples Gas customer, told the ICC how rising Peoples Gas bills have hit neighborhoods hard.

*Peoples Gas' Rates are unaffordable, already, for so many, in our city. The proposed rate hike will hit many families, even whole communities hard, and these are communities already suffering from generations of environmental and economic injustices.*

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- Regina Simms is a former Peoples Gas customer who now lives in Justice, and she's a parent leader with POWER-PAC IL, the statewide parent-led organization supported by Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI). She moved from Chicago in part because of the high bills.

*I lived in Chicago and was a Peoples Gas customer for years. The cost of living in the city, including the gas bill, got so high that I moved to the suburbs to better afford housing...I can speak for my family, and families in my community, to say that gas bills are already too high.*

- Jordan Hamrick, a Peoples Gas customer and a Utility Watchdog Organizer with Illinois PIRG, urged the ICC to reform Peoples Gas' pipeline program.

*For more than a decade, Peoples Gas has mismanaged its pipe-replacement program. The program is failing to effectively mitigate safety risks and is causing widespread affordability problems....Left unchecked, Peoples Gas will continue to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on the program annually, driving up bills further and making the transition to clean energy much more challenging....At long last, the Commission has the opportunity to reform the failing pipe-replacement program.*

- Courtney Hanson, a Peoples Gas customer and Deputy Director of People for Community Recovery, pointed out that customers now pay an average of about \$50 a month in fixed costs—before using any gas.

*While families struggle to make ends meet, Peoples Gas is trying to ram through the largest gas rate hike in the state's history. The company has already boasted record profits year after year thanks to exorbitant late fees and fixed charges that have customers paying nearly \$50 a month before even turning on their stove or furnace. These charges place an undue burden on lower-usage customers along with fixed-income and low-income residents. Not only should the ICC reject Peoples Gas' proposal for an even higher fixed charge, it should lower it, empowering customers to manage their bills through energy efficiency and conservation.*

- J.C. Kibbey, Senior Illinois Energy Advocate for NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council), said gas is unsustainable from a financial, health and environmental perspective.

*Peoples Gas and the fossil gas industry are cooking our planet, hurting our health, and draining our wallets. We can't afford to double down on a gas system that's unsustainable in every sense of the word. We need to start planning for the transition to clean heat and clean buildings now. The climate crisis can't wait.*

- Jim Chilsen, Director of Communications for the Citizens Utility Board (CUB), a nonprofit consumer watchdog that is challenging the Peoples Gas rate hike, spoke at the rally about how Chicagoans are weary of high Peoples Gas bills.

*Today, we've come to Chicago City Hall to urge Mayor Brandon Johnson and the City Council to pass a Clean and Affordable Buildings Ordinance. Each year, CUB holds events across the city of Chicago and we've talked with thousands of gas customers, and there's one message we hear loud and clear: 'We can't afford Peoples Gas.' People are hurting. We're in a heating affordability crisis. We need cleaner, cheaper ways to heat our homes.*

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**Illinois PIRG** is an advocate for the public interest. We speak out for a healthier, safer world in which we're freer to pursue our own individual well-being and the common good. Learn more at [www.illinoispirg.org](http://www.illinoispirg.org).

**Citizens Utility Board (CUB)** is 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 website, [www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org](http://www.CitizensUtilityBoard.org).