



Honorable Roy Cooper
Governor of North Carolina

President Pro Tem Phil Berger
North Carolina Senate

Speaker Tim Moore
North Carolina House

Subject: Opening this state to competition by ending the government-protected Duke Energy monopoly

Dear Governor Cooper, President Berger and Speaker Moore:

North Carolinians who are being harmed by worsening floods and hurricanes hereby call for your support in order to protect our communities' physical and economic well-being from the polluting practices of Duke Energy and Dominion Energy, which are making those impacts worse and threatening all residents. As part of a new coalition of 15 local, state, and national nonprofit organizations, we are calling for sweeping reform to this state's outdated electric power system in order to pave the way for competition from cheaper, renewable energy alternatives.

In short, the interests of utility monopolies no longer coincide with those of the state's electric power customers. Monopolies are badly outdated, and Duke Energy, which generates more than 90 percent of North Carolina's electricity, promises 1) more coal ash, 2) more climate-wrecking fracked gas, 3) constant rate hikes, 4) increasingly devastating hurricanes, 5) more harm to communities by calling hog waste biogas "clean energy" and, 6) only 8 percent renewable energy by 2033.

Our new campaign is called Energy Justice NC: End the Duke Monopoly. We are calling for a justice-based transition to clean energy, one that helps all North Carolinians and prioritizes those already being harmed physically and economically by impacts resulting from the practices of government-protected electric monopolies.

Farming, tourism and many other industries are being damaged by repeated flooding from superstorms Florence, Michael and Matthew, and from other torrential rain events that have increased in recent years due to rising global temperatures. With hurricane Florence, scientists attribute half the record rainfall to our warming climate. Even worse, our fellow North Carolinians are suffering; widespread human and economic damage from such events is projected to accelerate; and these harms fall disproportionately upon those with low and fixed incomes, as well as people of color. Evidence indicates that Duke Energy's decades of coal-fired generation and its recent increase in the use of fracked "natural" gas have contributed significantly to these disasters.

North Carolina must open the electricity market up to competition, particularly because solar and wind power are now cheaper than grid power – and their prices continue to fall. Many other U.S. utilities, other states, and other nations are rapidly shifting to solar and wind, a trend that’s accelerating as recent breakthroughs and falling prices of battery technologies are advancing the long-sought storage of renewable energy at homes and businesses. In fact, business experts say the growth of storage is “upending” the U.S. and global power industry and is a hopeful boost for efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions.

By contrast, Duke Energy is set to keep raising retail and wholesale rates indefinitely because its executives have promised investors “multiple rate cases” (increases) in coming years. Even as most of the world is moving away from fossil fuels, Duke leaders are trying to lock in billions of dollars of rate increases so their captive customers will be stuck paying for pipelines and dozens of fracked gas-fired power plants that aren’t needed to meet our energy needs.

Recent polls show that large majorities of North Carolina voters want energy competition and more renewable power, and they are concerned about coastal area damage from more intense storms. While many other U.S. utilities are already more than 30 percent renewable – and projecting to double those levels – Duke Energy plans to aim for only 8 percent renewable in the Carolinas by 2033.

Few people responding to those polls were aware that solar and wind energy are now cheaper than grid power, or that battery storage can protect homes, businesses and communities from power outages caused by weather extremes. Nor have they learned that the distributed, clean energy approach can build strong communities by creating thousands more jobs – spread across small towns and cities – than Duke Energy’s plans for more fracked gas.

This is not a question of conservative or liberal politics. There are many reasons we must end the capture of North Carolina’s energy future by electric monopolies. Some people are simply concerned about the continuing rise of power bills due to fracked gas investments. Others are more disturbed by coal ash pollution, destructive weather and climate change. Whichever the case, one thing is clear: North Carolinians across the political spectrum are concerned about the harms of our current system.

The Energy Justice NC Coalition seeks your help to bring North Carolina together around the need for major change in the state’s electric industry because the current system is broken. We will work at the local and statewide level to build broad bipartisan backing in three key areas:

- Urging local and state officials to support utility reform that opens this state to competition;
- Urging all elected and civic officials at the local and state levels to reject political influence money from the electric monopolies; and
- Making appointments that create a Utilities Commission that prioritizes the interests of North Carolinians instead of the monopolies.

This campaign goes to the root of the problem: corporate monopolies’ harmful practices are protected by their corrosive influence over what should be democratic decision-making. Duke and Dominion exercise monopoly and sometimes bullying control over local, state and civic officials in a manner not befitting a society based on ideals of independence and democracy.

As just one example, if not for undue political influence, how could Duke Energy even dare to force customers to pay billions for the coal ash negligence of its own executives? In addition to spending millions of customer dollars annually to greenwash its image and bend public and

civic officials toward silence or support, Duke leaders work aggressively to hamper renewable energy competition.

By working at the grassroots level across the state, the Energy Justice NC Coalition will also press for the advancement of cheaper, clean energy solutions – which are readily available – instead of the huge increase in the use of fracked gas that’s now underway by Duke Energy.

Market forces are in our favor, making distributed solar with storage cheaper than building fracked gas power plants and pipelines.

This coalition will seek the involvement of scores of organizations: impacted community groups, business and agriculture interests, and social justice, youth, environmental and faith organizations, among others. These are people who realize that this crisis of monopoly control, serial rate hikes and accelerating weather extremes demands an urgent approach that provokes public engagement to a level never seen before in this state.

Members of this coalition and other stakeholders have ideas and expertise about what utility reform should look like, and we call on you to facilitate an open process to determine the best path forward. What is non-negotiable is that the current system is badly broken and must change.

Residents across the political spectrum want clean energy competition and genuine, timely climate solutions. Now is the time for this state to pull together and make wise, democratically-based decisions about our energy future – and to break free from having our state dominated by the profit-driven interests of corporate monopolies. We look forward to working with you to allow North Carolinians to choose their sources of electricity.

As a first step, we ask each of you to set a new standard by publicly agreeing to refuse any further direct or indirect contributions from Duke Energy and Dominion Energy.

Sincerely,

350 Triangle

Alliance for Climate Education

Alliance for Energy Democracy

Appalachian Voices

Concerned Citizens of Maxton

Center for Biological Diversity

Down East Coal Ash Coalition

Food & Water Watch

Friends of the Earth

NC Climate Justice Collective

NC Environmental Justice Network

NC WARN

Protecting Progress in Durham

Rachel Carson Council

RedTailed Hawk Collective