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**To:** ICC Staff & Celia Johnson

**Date:** June 30, 2026

**Subject:** Small Business Response to Phase 2C Summary Report (Future of Gas Proceedings)

The National Federation of Independent Business (NFIB) is the largest small business advocacy organization in Illinois and the nation, representing more than 10,000 small business owners in Illinois alone. NFIB member businesses are independently owned and reflect the diversity of Illinois' small business community, including small businesses in retail, construction, transportation, hospitality, professional services, manufacturing, and agriculture.

Earlier this year NFIB, along with other business groups, petitioned the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC) to “terminate or suspend the Future of Natural Gas proceeding, including all workshops and issues associated with decarbonization of the gas distribution system....”

The petition, Docket No. 26-0146, outlines a number of concerns with the proceedings. The present comments will, in some instances, echo the concerns outlined in the petition, but will be briefer and focus primarily upon affordability and consumer choices. To avoid redundancy, most of the concerns outlined in the petition will not be repeated.

The direction of the Future of Gas proceedings—as outlined in the Phase 2C Summary Report—gives the small business community reason for alarm. Many of the proposals included in the report would limit consumer choice and drive up business costs.

Soaring electricity costs have already hit Illinois' small business community hard. In a recent survey of NFIB members in Illinois:

- 75% of respondents reported significant increases in electricity prices
- 10% of respondents reported moderate increases in electricity prices
- 7% of respondents reported mild increases in electricity prices

These costs are forcing small business owners to raise prices, delay investments, and cut staff, services, and hours.

Forcing electrification on the small business community—either directly or indirectly (by raising traditional-energy costs)—at a time of significant electricity price hikes will negatively impact Illinois small businesses' ability to compete in a global economy and to serve their customers.



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Inadequate electricity supply has been driving the recent electricity price hikes and fluctuations in Illinois. According to a report published by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA), the Illinois Power Agency (IPA), and the Illinois Commerce Commission (ICC), Illinois' electricity grids "are projected to face capacity shortfalls over the coming decade unless additional capacity resources are developed."

The agencies' report indicates that two factors are primarily responsible: 1) "concentrated load growth from data center development in addition to load growth from residential and commercial customers" and 2) the state's environmental-policy-driven closure of traditional power plants. The report noted that the state's policy decisions are forcing "coal, oil, and gas-fueled generators in Illinois" to retire "in alignment with [Illinois' newly enacted] emissions limits...."

In this atmosphere of constraint and inadequate generation of electricity, it would be bizarre to further constrain the development or use of natural gas. It would double down on failed policies that undercut affordability in Illinois. As the petition noted: "Given the facts known today, it makes no sense to pursue the elimination of a source of energy for Illinois residents that is abundant and affordable (compared to electricity), and which remains critical to support their well-being, as well as future economic development in the state."

Due to the sheer scope and number of the proposals outlined in the Phase 2C Summary Report and NFIB's ongoing request to terminate or suspend the proceedings, these comments will not respond to individual proposals. NFIB continues to believe that these proceedings should be terminated. It is neither feasible nor judicious to use limited resources to provide exhaustive comment on each individual proposal.

While the proposals summarized in the Phase 2C Summary Report would—no doubt—benefit the economic, commercial, and/or advocacy interests of the parties submitting the proposals, NFIB remains concerned that many of them would have a negative impact on the small business community as a whole. Participants in this spring's workshops openly discussed the real costs to businesses and consumers that their recommendations would cause but dismissed their import by claiming that vague "cost-effectiveness" and "societal benefits" would offset them. In plain language, the special interests championing these proposals would benefit, while consumers and small businesses would be left to bear the brunt of the cost.

At a time of increasing electricity demand and rising prices, small businesses overwhelmingly oppose the phasing out of natural gas. In a recent survey of NFIB members in Illinois, 98% of respondents opposed phasing out or banning the use of natural gas. As noted in previous comments submitted during the Future of Gas proceedings: "For many small businesses, natural gas is the most cost-effective way to power their operations. Others in specialty occupations, such as hospitality and agriculture, utilize equipment reliant upon natural gas."



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Illinois should pursue policies that increase energy options, not limit them. Delaying—or better yet—eliminating current requirements to shutter proven and reliable energy sources and creating a regulatory environment that encourages, rather than discourages, private investment in these energy sources would be a significant step toward increasing affordability and improving business conditions in Illinois.