

**STATE OF ILLINOIS
ILLINOIS COMMERCE COMMISSION**

Illinois Commerce Commission, On Its Own)	22-0487
Motion)	
-vs-)	
Ameren Illinois Company d/b/a/ Ameren)	
Illinois)	
)	
Order Requiring Ameren Illinois Company to)	
file an Initial Multi-Year Integrated Grid Plan)	(cons.)
and Initiating Proceeding to Determine Whether)	
the Plan is Reasonable and Complies with the)	
Public Utilities Act.)	
)	
Ameren Illinois Company d/b/a Ameren Illinois)	23-0082
)	
Petition for Approval of a Multi-Year Rate Plan)	
pursuant to 220 ILCS 5/16-108.18.)	
)	

**DIRECT TESTIMONY OF GREGORY NORRIS
ON BEHALF OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEFENSE FUND**

EDF Ex. 3.0

May 11, 2023

1 **Q. Please state your name and where you live.**

2 A. My name is Gregory Norris. I live in Alton, Illinois.

3 **Q. What company provides your electric service?**

4 A. Ameren Electric.

5 **Q. On whose behalf are you testifying in this proceeding?**

6 A. I am testifying on behalf of Environmental Defense Fund.

7 **Q. By whom are you employed and in what capacity?**

8 A. I am the founder of ACES 4 Youth (Area Consortium of Educational Services for our
9 Youth). ACES 4 Youth is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, founded in 2005, focused
10 on civic and participatory engagement and problem-solving. Our motto is “Giving our
11 youth a winning hand.” One of the goals of ACES 4 Youth is to expose youth to clean
12 energy programs through our Stop the Violence program that educates 13-26-year-old
13 community members about energy efficiency, solar, and related training and job
14 opportunities provided by the Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act (CEJA) and other
15 federal programs, particularly those under Justice40. Clean energy provides a pathway to
16 meaningful, good-paying jobs that gives youth and young adults hope and a career that
17 can serve their community, while combatting the cycles that can lead to gun violence.
18 Everyone should have the opportunity to participate in a “Just Transition” that is
19 equitable for all. ACES 4 Youth removes barriers to that participation.

20 **Q. Tell us more about your background.**

21 A. I spent twenty-two years in the United States Marines. I was honorably discharged in
22 1992 with the rank of Master Sergeant. I have since spent my life running numerous
23 tutoring, civic engagement, and neighborhood development programs, including Global

24 Vision Network, Alton Neighborhood Development Coalition (ANDC), and ACES 4
25 Youth. I also served with AmeriCorps as a VISTA (Volunteer in Service to America), the
26 NAACP Illinois State Veterans Affairs Chair, and as a Commissioner with the Illinois
27 Environmental Protection Agency.

28 In 2017, I became involved with the Downstate Caucus and the Illinois Clean
29 Jobs Coalition (ICJC). The Downstate Caucus was formed to establish representation
30 from that area of the state within the ICJC. In 2020, I founded Illinois Social Equity,
31 Equality and Environmental Justice (ISEE-EJ) with a focus on addressing systemic
32 racism and the Social Determinants of Health, especially for Black and Brown people,
33 particularly for people of African Heritage, because there was a lack of meaningful Black
34 representations from environmental justice communities. I also served on the Illinois
35 State Climate Table Steering Committee of the ICJC and the Inaugural Leadership Team
36 of the Downstate Caucus, all of which were instrumental in the development and
37 negotiations for CEJA. I was also recently elected Board Chair of the Midwest Building
38 Decarbonization Coalition.

39 Power Building people and being part of coalitions like these are important to
40 making sure customers' rights are protected. For instance, when CEJA was being
41 negotiated, Ameren stopped accepting applications for its net metering program, claiming
42 they had met the enrollment requirement. The ICJC brought the issue to the Illinois
43 Commerce Commission to have it resolved.¹ If no one is watching, if no one is
44 advocating, nothing changes.

¹ <https://energynews.us/2020/10/14/southern-illinois-solar-energy-growth-prompts-fight-over-net-metering-math/>

45 **Q. Why did you start ISEE-EJ?**

46 A. When I was a young Marine, I approached an officer with a problem I had identified. He
47 told me, “Marines don’t come in with a problem unless they have a solution.” I have
48 approached challenges I’ve encountered with those wise words in mind. I started ISEE-
49 EJ because I saw that the people and communities that live with more pollution, lower
50 paying jobs, less educational opportunities, more gun violence, and poorer health –
51 important indicators of inequity and injustice – were not part of the discussions about
52 Illinois’ energy policy. It is important for members of these communities to feel like there
53 is hope for policy changes that support marginalized people with solutions that address
54 “root causes” to poverty.

55 I also don’t want the energy transition to suffer the same fate as the dramatic
56 changes of the technology boom 20 years ago. Black students would say to me “that’s for
57 white folks, not for us.” To this day, the inequitable “digital divide” is a barrier for Black
58 and Brown households across the country. They did not feel like they had a stake in the
59 digital transition because they had not been invited to participate and therefore didn’t
60 have the same access. The systemic impact of the digital divide spans generations. The
61 reality of this impact was highlighted during the start of the COVID19 Pandemic when
62 Black and Brown students were sent home from school to study online and were without
63 access to internet service and/or a computer to do schoolwork online.

64 ACES 4 Youth and ISEE-EJ’s involvement in CEJA presents a unique
65 opportunity to stop the systemic cycle of discrimination when it comes to energy
66 investments. Utilities should prioritize investments to benefit neighborhoods in
67 communities that have been impacted the most, often overlooked and left behind by the

68 current energy system and systemic oppression. Utilities have to reach out—really reach
69 out - with the help of community members, not by hiring a bunch of outside door
70 knockers—to ensure communities know they are not being left behind this time.

71 **Q. Why did you decide to provide testimony in this case?**

72 A. My journey in the world of energy policy has been one of necessity. I got involved
73 because no one else in my community was. So much is changing about how energy is
74 provided and I couldn't find anyone that was actively participating to represent
75 communities like mine. I didn't realize I could have a say until I joined the Stakeholder
76 Advisory Group (SAG) to provide input to Ameren's 5-year plan. That lack of
77 engagement is why I'm testifying in this case and why I'm working for policy change.

78 I also know the current cost of electricity is not sustainable. I have been staying
79 with a relative in an area served by a cooperative utility for several months and my light
80 bill at my house is still \$150 per month. There are only two lights on most of the time at
81 my house. Affordability is an equity issue; the lack of affordability has an outsized
82 impact on Black and Brown residential neighborhoods of communities. The programs
83 available today aren't providing lasting help or change to make energy
84 affordable. Utilities send customers to other agencies to get LIHEAP and other payment
85 assistance. Customers then send all of that assistance money back to the utility. There's
86 never a fix to the structural problems that cause the affordability gap, but the utility takes
87 credit for looking like it is helping.

88 **Q. Does Ameren support Black and Brown organizations through its charitable and**
89 **public giving?**

90 A. Yes, I have seen the Urban League, NAACP, and Black Chamber of Commerce with big
91 checks that have Ameren's name on them. In 2020 Ameren gave out \$100 gift cards to
92 NAACP branch members to offset electric bills around Christmas. The result of these
93 donations is that the organizations, individual members, and residents are less likely to
94 speak out against Ameren and their high electric bills. In my opinion, Ameren uses
95 funding in a legal and strategic, but potentially unethical, manner to mute the voices of
96 organizations like these so there are fewer voices advocating for big, fundamental change
97 in how the energy system works. It makes me mad to watch this happen over and over
98 and to see organizations step back as a result of what is relatively little given on
99 Ameren's part but can be quite impactful to grassroots organizations that are just trying to
100 get the system to be equitable.²

101

102

103 **Q. Are you aware of other community outreach Ameren has done?**

104 A. Yes, there are ways they say they are reaching out to communities. For instance, they
105 work locally with the Madison County Community Action Agency, but that isn't
106 community and certain neighborhoods are overlooked. Organizations like that send
107 predominantly white people to give out lightbulbs and talk about energy efficiency to
108 people in predominantly Black and Brown communities. People don't answer the door.
109 I've watched it happen. Then they count the number of doors knocked toward their
110 program metrics, not what is actually delivered, so it seems largely futile. This outreach

² Strings Attached: How utilities use charitable giving to influence politics and increase investor profits, Energy and Policy Institute, available at:

<https://www.energyandpolicy.org/strings-attached-how-utilities-use-charitable-giving-to-influence-politics-increase-investor-profits-ameren/>.

111 approach isn't going to work due to historical lack of trust. It is imperative that outreach
112 is conducted by trusted messengers of the community to make people aware of Ameren
113 programs.

114 There are two kinds of participation: civic engagement and participatory
115 engagement. When I knock on the door to talk to a neighbor about an issue, that's civic
116 engagement. When I vote on that issue, that's participatory engagement. Ameren needs to
117 focus its efforts on supporting more participatory engagement. For energy, civic
118 engagement is knocking on doors and handing out light bulbs; participatory engagement
119 is when community representatives are at the table as a stakeholder when decisions are
120 being made.

121 **Q. What have you done in response to Ameren's lack of meaningful engagement in**
122 **your neighborhood?**

123 I have had to seek other resources so communities aren't left behind. For instance,
124 in 2020 I received organizing training and a grant from RE-AMP called "Power Built" to
125 engage people in the Metroeast and Southern Illinois. We conduct local energy
126 efficiency sessions for people on our own, separate from Ameren-run programs. I'm also
127 working with Carbondale University on a Department of Energy Community LEAP
128 Technical Assistant to make the community more environmentally friendly or green. I've
129 also applied for funding through the Building Up Hero X program for building retrofits to
130 get help to write a concept paper on a program to retrofit HUD and Section 8 homes.

131 **Q. What types of change do you believe are necessary for a more just and equitable**
132 **energy system?**

133 A. Number one is energy efficiency and weatherization for those with the highest energy
134 burden and communities that have been harmed or lacked investment historically, often
135 Black and Brown neighborhoods in communities and those living with poverty. We need
136 energy efficiency and weatherization for homeowners and policies that require landlords
137 to weatherize rental homes before receiving Section 8 Vouchers.

138 Homes need to be weatherized and energy efficient for solar to be most beneficial.
139 Especially in the context of electrification, because even if some of the power is being
140 generated by local solar, it isn't solving the problem if the heat is seeping out of the house
141 because it's old and drafty and doesn't have any insulation. We need to focus on what
142 will reduce energy bills the most. This is also an approach that will increase
143 affordability.

144 The energy efficiency kits provided by Ameren certainly aren't enough. Though
145 they contain some good things, like surge protectors, I'm not sure many of the ones they
146 give to kids at school even make it into homes. In fact, I've seen some of them being sold
147 before they even get there. Ameren should work with local, grassroots organizations to
148 deliver their programs and services. As described above, there is a significant trust gap
149 for impacted neighborhoods in communities. The way to reach them is to educate and
150 empower residents in the area to share information on programs that are available, how
151 people can take advantage of them, and to provide support if people need it to participate.
152 Culturally, churches are a good place to start and can offer a lot of help, but also can't be
153 the only channel of outreach. I have been trying to get my organization on the list of
154 contractors with Ameren to provide energy efficiency information to communities but

155 haven't been successful, which I presume is due to the fact that I have been critical of
156 previous outreach efforts.

157 Local workforce training and hiring is another critical and related piece. There is a
158 lot of economic potential in the energy transition that can and should be used to support
159 those who are in need of training, internships, jobs and economic stability. Training used
160 to be available at community colleges for weatherization, but I don't see that now.
161 Certification programs for careers in things like energy efficiency audits and upgrades
162 and solar installation will (1) help address the backlog of contractors and get these
163 services out; (2) increase the financial wellbeing of those who are struggling with things
164 like energy bills, and (3) develop a more diverse workforce that has the trust of their
165 neighbors and have lifelong skills.

166 Equity also requires the public availability of transparent data that shows whether
167 and how communities are benefiting (or not) from new investments.

168 **Q. Have you had any recent experiences that give you hope for the type of change you**
169 **advocate for?**

170 Yes. Recently the ICJC met with the new Chair and President of Ameren Illinois. I was
171 there representing Downstate residents. We talked a lot about the need for outreach –
172 meaningful outreach. If it weren't for my participation in the SAG and Illinois Energy
173 Efficiency for All, I would have no idea what programs are available to support
174 communities. I am hopeful and do believe that outreach will improve in most impacted
175 community neighborhoods. But a significant amount of the implementation of CEJA
176 remains to be done and, so far, is not being done in a way that will achieve the true intent
177 of the bill, being equitable.

178 **Q. What do you want the ICC to take away from your testimony?**

179 A lot of change is happening on the electric grid. CEJA must be equitability implemented
180 in a meaningful and impactful way to better the lives of people in Illinois, with a duty to
181 focus on increasing equity and justice by ensuring benefits are targeted at community
182 neighborhoods, negatively impacted by the energy system historically.

183 As I mentioned above, weatherization must be a critical focus for residents, with
184 particular attention to how to get landlords to make their housing more efficient for their
185 renters. Further, Ameren can and must do genuine local engagement with neighborhoods
186 and communities to be part of the change – as participants, business owners, employees,
187 service providers, and community liaisons. With that approach, we all win.

188 **Q. Does this conclude your testimony?**

189 A. Yes.