

**Congress of the United States**  
Washington, DC 20515

February 26, 2021

The Honorable Rebecca Slaughter  
Acting Chair  
Federal Trade Commission  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20580

Dear Acting Chair Slaughter:

Thank you for your work to protect consumers from deceptive and unfair practices, particularly in recent months of crisis and vulnerability as we respond to the many challenges of the coronavirus pandemic. As a member of the Consumer Protection & Commerce subcommittee of the Committee on Energy & Commerce, I look forward to working with your office to safeguard all American consumers.

As you know well, times when people are most vulnerable are also times when some see opportunity for fraudulent products and scams. I write to you now because it is unfortunately such a time in Texas.

Texas experienced an epic winter storm beginning on February 14, 2021. So great were the anticipated impacts that President Biden signed a federal disaster declaration that day for all 254 Texas counties. Less than a week later, he signed a major disaster declaration covering much of the state, and new areas continue to be added.

While people across Texas were without power and water, predatory actors were already at work. On February 16, with 3.2 million Texas residents without power, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) warned residents of a scam asking customers to text their private account numbers to restore their power.<sup>1</sup> Just the day before, Houston Police Chief Art Acevedo reported that people were impersonating employees of the area's utility provider, CenterPoint Energy, to gain access to people's homes.<sup>2</sup> Though the majority of Texans now have their power restored, these and other schemes relating to recovery projects from the storm—from repairing broken pipes to rehabilitating flooded homes—provide ample opportunity for scams.

Because of this continued threat, I ask that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) coordinate with Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton and Harris County Attorney Christian Menefee to hold these unscrupulous actors accountable. While some of these scams originate locally, many

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<sup>1</sup> *Scammers Are Targeting Texans as Winter Storm Leaves Many Without Power, Feds Warn*, Yahoo News (Feb. 19, 2021) ([news.yahoo.com/scammers-targeting-texans-winter-storm-024243736.html](https://news.yahoo.com/scammers-targeting-texans-winter-storm-024243736.html)).

<sup>2</sup> *Fake Energy Workers Looking to Get Inside Homes Without Power, HPD Chief Says*, ABC 13 Eyewitness News (Feb. 16, 2021) ([abc13.com/texas-power-outage-centerpoint-energy-fake-workers-robbery/10342478/](https://abc13.com/texas-power-outage-centerpoint-energy-fake-workers-robbery/10342478/)).

scams will come through social media and the internet, necessitating the FTC's coordination and cooperation.

As we look to the future, we must ensure that those who would commit fraud against our citizens in this particularly vulnerable moment are held accountable. To this end, I also ask the FTC to answer:

1. What protocols or procedures, if any, does the FTC have in place to respond to unfair and deceptive practices that too often occur during and after emergencies such as natural disasters or public health emergencies?
2. What resources and activities does the FTC dedicate to consumer protection and fraud prevention in preparation for such emergencies?

Fraud is never acceptable. But the targeting of the most vulnerable, those suffering through disaster and crisis, is unconscionable. The FTC must do all in its power to protect these consumers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lizzie Fletcher". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "F".

Lizzie Fletcher  
Member of Congress