

Written Testimony of Mark Aysta, Duke Energy

U.S. House of Representatives

House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Energy, Climate, and Grid Security

Field Hearing on Moore County Incident

Pinehurst, NC

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[Introduction]

Thank you, Chairman Duncan and members of the subcommittee.

My name is Mark Aysta, and I appreciate the opportunity to be with you today representing Duke Energy, where I serve as the managing director of enterprise security.

I have more than 27 years of experience as a law enforcement officer, including almost 22 years at the FBI. For the last four and half years, I've been applying that experience at Duke Energy.

We're one of the largest energy holding companies in the nation, serving 10 million electric and gas customers across seven states in the Southeast and Midwest, and our customers depend on us for an essential service.

We know how critical it is that we provide our customers and communities with reliable, affordable and increasingly clean energy – and our comprehensive security strategy is part of that commitment.

In my role, I'm responsible for the safety and security of nearly 28,000 employees, as well as the thousands of assets we have in the field. My team oversees all aspects of our security, including physical access control systems, uniformed security officers, threat intelligence and more.

Duke Energy has always had a robust security strategy to deter attacks and respond quickly as they occur, and that approach is much more than just physical barriers and defenses.

Our multi-layered security strategy includes protective barriers, monitoring and control capabilities, and a cross-functional team assessing threats 24/7/365.

We also partner with industry peers and engage in daily intelligence-sharing with law enforcement at all levels. This strategy is always evolving, as we evaluate new and emerging threats and expand our partnerships.

We are all here today because, on the night of December 3, two Duke Energy substations in Moore County were attacked, cutting power to 45,000 customers in the area.

The repairs were extensive, and Duke Energy had crews doing 24-hour shifts, working through multiple repair paths and replacing several large and important pieces of equipment to restore service.

We appreciate how patient our customers were, and we saw incredible support from the local community during this extended and challenging outage. We continue to work with the FBI and local law enforcement on their investigations into the attacks in Moore County.

We have also taken steps to enhance our security strategy in the wake of the attacks. I would like to share with you some of the measures we have taken.

Immediately after the attacks, we increased monitoring capabilities at our substations in Moore County. And over the past six months, we have done a comprehensive review of our electric assets across our six-state service territory.

As a result of our review, we are shifting from a tiered ranking system focused largely on an asset's impact to the bulk electric system to a tiered approach with a greater focus on potential impacts to customers.

Through this lens, we've identified opportunities to increase security and surveillance and we're developing implementation schedules for this work.

We are also improving our processes and rapid-response protocols for essential equipment and personnel.

We've identified critical parts with long-lead times that may be needed for repairs to essential equipment. And we are working to strategically locate those parts to be available for rapid deployment.

We have embarked on a plan to train chief law enforcement officers across our six-state footprint on threats to the grid and how they can better protect it.

We will continue exploring opportunities for additional improvements in the future, even as we execute on these upgrades today.

But we understand that even with a robust strategy of deterrence and monitoring, no utility can completely eliminate the risk of an attack. That is the reality of operating an electric system that extends across nearly 100,000 square miles and includes thousands of substations and millions of components. And it is why we firmly believe grid resiliency must be part of this conversation. The same self-healing technology that can detect outages from storms, isolate problems and reroute power to restore service to customers can also help mitigate the impact of an attack on the grid.

Investments in resiliency are a critical part of the 75 billion dollars in grid improvements Duke Energy has planned for its electric utilities over the next decade.

[Closing]

With an electric grid that spans multiple states, Duke Energy does not believe that grid-security mandates containing a one-size-fits-all approach would lead to better protection, affordability or reliability for our customers.

We look forward to taking part in the conversation and working with Congress on how best to deter attacks, protect our infrastructure, bolster our supply chain to more quickly replace critical equipment, and recover faster from attacks and other adverse events.

With that, I welcome your questions.