



Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County, TN

Legislation Text

File #: RS2020-668, **Version:** 1

A resolution supporting efforts to assist limited-income families with home energy retrofits.

WHEREAS, according to a recent [study <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7544699/>](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7544699/) published on the U.S. National Library of Medicine website, the stay-in-place orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in a significant increase in home energy bills, which is likely to continue with a similar pattern of at least a 20% increase; and

WHEREAS, despite comparatively low electricity rates, Nashville faces the challenge that approximately 16.5% of its residents live in poverty; and

WHEREAS, rates of poverty coincide with poorly-weatherized housing stock; and poorly-weatherized homes prevent older residents from aging in place, making them more susceptible to predatory homebuyers; and

WHEREAS, the cost burden of energy-inefficient homes falls particularly heavily upon vulnerable citizens, contributing to decreased educational achievement, financial instability, and pervasive cycles of poverty; and

WHEREAS, the energy burden from the combination of poverty, poorly-weatherized and aging housing stock is a significant impediment to equity and livability in Nashville; and

WHEREAS, high energy burdens and substandard housing stock also contribute to mental and physical health challenges, particularly among children and the elderly, contributing to Nashville's rates of respiratory illness such as asthma and other endemic health conditions; and

WHEREAS, households in the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) footprint earning less than 50% of the federal poverty level are spending an average of 29% of their income on utilities when income expenditure of 6% is considered affordable; and

WHEREAS, NES and TVA have committed initial seed funding to a Home Energy Uplift program, which provides whole-home energy improvements to limited-income families who own homes in Davidson County; and

WHEREAS, a utility bill round-up program (which allows customers to round-up their monthly utility bills to the next whole dollar, with resulting donations averaging approximately \$0.50 cents per month) with a customer-remove policy approach could garner participation of approximately 60 to 65% of NES's customer base, increasing the households Home Energy Uplift can serve to 180 per year; and

WHEREAS, NES's energy experts, in partnership with TVA and Metro, successfully weatherized 125 low-

income Nashville households through a program called “Home Energy Uplift,” which provides whole-home, deep-energy retrofits valued at an average of \$8,000 each -- providing the tools and information needed for these homes to be as energy-efficient and comfortable as possible; and

WHEREAS, Home Energy Uplift has resulted in lower utility bills for low-income customers through more energy-efficient single-family houses and has alleviated strain on community utility bill payment assistance resources; and

WHEREAS, NES has affirmed that a round-up donation program would allow Home Energy Uplift to substantially increase the amount of weatherization services available to the community, benefiting a significant at-risk segment of the NES customer base, thereby serving the best interests of TVA, NES, and their customers; and

WHEREAS, there is successful precedent in other Tennessee urban areas -- including Knoxville, Morristown, and Memphis -- for automatically enrolling utility customers in an optional round-up program to generate revenue for low-income weatherization grants, and for leveraging those local funds toward additional program investment from the TVA; and

WHEREAS, the Metropolitan Council should support all reasonable efforts to promote home energy retrofitting, and support programs that provide a mechanism for home energy retrofit assistance to low-income households.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE METROPOLITAN GOVERNMENT OF NASHVILLE AND DAVIDSON COUNTY:

Section 1. The Metropolitan Council hereby goes on record as supporting efforts to assist limited-income families with home energy retrofits, including but not limited, an NES round-up donation program, such that all ratepayers will be enrolled in the program automatically.

Section 2. The Metropolitan Council further goes on record as requesting that this transition in the round-up program, which could be called the “Stay In Place” campaign, allow any NES ratepayer to be able to elect not to participate in the program easily and promptly at any time, even after implementation of the program goes into effect.

Section 3. The Metropolitan Council further goes on record as requesting that such transition be extensively and effectively marketed to all NES customers and to the general public at large prior to its implementation. Such marketing efforts should be conducted through a variety of methods, including direct mail, social media, telephone notification, and/or newspaper notice, so as to ensure that every potentially affected customer is notified well prior to implementation of the program. Implementation should not proceed until after such notification efforts have been concluded.

Section 4. The Metropolitan Council further goes on record as encouraging NES to find creative ways to use funding provided by such a program to create educational and employment opportunities within its service area that would further reduce economic hardships for Davidson County’s poorest citizens, particularly

focusing on renewable energy, job creation, and building upon NES's track record of supporting local, MWBEs, and small businesses by people the community trusts.

Section 5. The Metropolitan Council further goes on record as requesting that, in creating the employment opportunities referenced above, NES give priority to certified, MWBE energy professionals and to contractors from zip codes of highest energy burden.

Section 6. The Metropolitan Council further goes on record as requesting NES Home Energy Uplift administrators issue a report to all members of the Metropolitan Council at least annually regarding the success of the fund, including in such report data regarding revenues, expenditures, ratepayer participation rates, most burdened communities and key performance indicators -- including but not limited to households served, energy efficiencies realized, and minority contractor outcomes.

Section 7. The Metropolitan Clerk is directed to send a copy of this Resolution to Decosta Jenkins, President and CEO of NES, and to each member of the NES board of directors.

Section 8. That this resolution shall take effect from and after its adoption, the welfare of The Metropolitan Government of Nashville and Davidson County requiring it.