

Just Energy Memphis Media Advisory

On Tuesday, April 19th, the Memphis Branch of the NAACP, along with the Southern Alliance for Clean Energy and the Sierra Club Healthy Communities Project, hosted an introductory meeting at the Memphis Bioworks Foundation on the groups' *Just Energy Memphis* project. The meeting brought together leaders from county and city government, local service agencies, community development groups and Memphis Light, Gas, and Water staff to discuss how to reduce high utility bills for low-income communities. This event was the first step in developing a city-wide coalition that can help educate and empower low-income communities about how they can reduce utility bills as well as identify who is not being served by current bill pay assistance and weatherization programs.

On average, low-income households spend double the amount of their monthly income on utility bills, compared to a moderate-income household. This means that almost 44% of low-income households struggle with energy insecurity, where families are unable to meet basic household heating, cooling and energy needs. These high-energy costs can be caused by old, energy-intensive appliances like refrigerators, hot-water heaters and HVAC systems or by poor housing conditions, like insufficient insulation and leaky windows and doors. Additionally, many Memphians are renters and are therefore unable to make necessary efficiency or building improvements that are traditionally undertaken by landlords.

Although there are current utility programs and non-profit bill-pay assistance programs in place to help reduce bills for these communities, many low-income customers cannot access these programs due to poor credit scores, economic status requirements or other eligibility barriers. Funding for the programs that are currently available is often insufficient when compared to the overwhelming need for these services. Additionally, many homes need basic structural improvements that do not traditionally fall into the weatherization program areas.

Not only can energy efficiency improvements help families reduce needlessly high utility bills, it can also become an important job creator for these same communities. Memphis Bioworks Foundation is currently recruiting students for a fully-funded three-week commercial energy efficiency job training program that certifies each student as a professional commercial energy efficiency auditor.

The Just Energy Memphis project will continue to work with these groups to determine how best to reduce utility bills in these communities and identify other leaders who can help bring these much needed resources to families throughout the city of Memphis.

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