

Tyrae Woodson-Samuels**Legislator, 13th District**

Chair, Committee on Budget & Appropriations

**Committee Assignments:**

Infrastructure & Housing
Public Safety & Veterans
Intergovernmental Affairs
Small Business

To: Honorable Members of the Westchester County Board of Legislators**From:** Hon. Tyrae Woodson-Samuels, County Legislator, District 13**Date:** TBD**Re:** Memo of Legislation — Utility Bill Navigation and Energy Affordability Act

PURPOSE AND OVERVIEW

The purpose of this legislation is to establish a Utility Bill Navigation and Energy Affordability Initiative to help Westchester residents access existing programs that can reduce heating, cooling, electric, gas, and overall household energy costs.

Utility bills are one of the most direct affordability pressures residents face. For seniors, working families, renters, homeowners, and residents on fixed incomes, even a modest increase in energy costs can create real strain.

This legislation does not create a new County utility subsidy. Instead, it makes government easier to navigate by helping residents connect with programs that already exist.

KEY PROVISIONS

This legislation would direct the County to create an Energy Affordability Navigator program or coordinated resource hub to assist residents with HEAP, emergency HEAP, utility affordability programs, arrears assistance, weatherization, energy efficiency programs, community solar, and other available resources.

The County would conduct outreach through libraries, senior centers, DSS offices, municipalities, community organizations, houses of worship, and public events.

The initiative would also include public education around utility scams, predatory energy service contracts, unnecessary charges, and practical ways residents can reduce energy costs.

The County would submit an annual Energy Affordability and Utility Assistance Report to the Board of Legislators showing residents assisted, referrals made, outreach conducted, communities with high energy burden, partnerships formed, and recommendations for improvement.

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FINDINGS AND RATIONALE

Utility costs are a major part of the affordability crisis. A household may be able to afford rent or a mortgage on paper, but still fall behind because of heating, cooling, electric, or gas costs.

Many residents qualify for assistance programs but are not enrolled because they do not know about them, find the process difficult, or lack help completing applications.

A navigation-focused approach allows the County to reduce financial pressure on residents without creating a costly new entitlement. It also helps prevent utility shut-offs, arrears, and emergency social service needs.

COORDINATION, EXISTING LAW, AND IMPLEMENTATION

The County shall coordinate with the Department of Social Services, Department of Senior Programs and Services, Department of Consumer Protection, Department of Planning, municipalities, utilities, state agencies, nonprofit providers, and community organizations.

This legislation is intended to complement existing programs such as HEAP, emergency HEAP, weatherization assistance, utility affordability programs, energy efficiency incentives, and other state, federal, utility, and nonprofit resources.

Implementation shall focus on outreach, enrollment assistance, public education, and referral coordination.

FISCAL AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

The fiscal impact is expected to be limited and primarily administrative. The initiative may be implemented through existing County outreach, social services, senior services, and consumer protection infrastructure where feasible.

Any new staffing, technology, public education campaign, or nonprofit contract would require separate appropriation.

This legislation is not intended to require a property tax increase.

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The environmental impact may be positive by connecting residents to weatherization, energy efficiency, and clean energy programs. The housing impact may be positive by helping households maintain essential utility service and avoid destabilizing arrears. The economic impact may include reduced household energy burden and less pressure on emergency assistance systems.

REVIEW AND EFFECTIVE DATE

The Board of Legislators shall review the initiative one year after enactment.

This Local Law shall take effect ninety days after filing with the Secretary of State.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tyrae Woodson-Samuels".

Tyrae Woodson-Samuels

Westchester County Legislator, District 13