



Good Afternoon Chairman Krueger, Chairman Prelow and Members of the respective Committees. My name is Anmarie Lanese, Founder & CEO of CanCode Communities.

CanCode's mission is to help individuals bridge the digital divide, which can significantly enhance economic mobility in our communities. Our goal is to create a vibrant, inclusive, talent-driven tech sector across New York State. For employers, we work locally with talent, educators, and businesses to bridge the gap between three key points:

- Employers who need specific skills;
- Non-traditional talent who can develop those skills; and
- Local educators who can teach those skills.

We focus on digital literacy as a bridge into our workforce development software and IT sector training programs, and to help individuals gain the computer skills necessary for a wide range of jobs.

I would like to make sure to address the issue of digital equity in workforce development, as it is often overlooked. In today's digital economy, digital equity isn't a luxury; it's a necessity to be a productive member of the workforce. A National Skills Coalition study highlights that 92% of all jobs require digital skills. Digital skills organizations cannot wait for federal dollars to address these critical workforce challenges and provide economic mobility for our neighbors across New York. Digital equity touches every area of life in New York State—from healthcare and civic engagement to education and beyond—underscoring the urgency of closing the digital divide.

As a state, we are lagging in our investment in digital skills, which is essential for creating a more equitable and prosperous future for all, especially for individuals with immense untapped potential to shape the future of our economy, workforce, and communities. It is imperative that we include funding for digital equity in this year's state budget to ensure that no one is left behind in our increasingly digital economy and workforce. **The State cannot have Economic Development without Workforce Development.**

In order to create Digital Equity in New York state you need three key things:

- **Access to Broadband**
- **Training for digital skills for the emerging workforce**
- **Access to devices**

New York State's Empire State Development's ConnectAll Office is expecting to receive \$36 million in funding from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Department of Commerce for capacity grants to organizations like ours across the state. These grants will be used to implement the State Digital Equity Plan over the next five years. However, we have two main concerns with this funding: 1) it will not be sufficient to achieve digital equity statewide, and 2) we have concerns that delays in funding distribution through ESD's

reimbursement-based structure will hinder the ability of programs across the state to execute this work. The majority of organizations working on digital equity closest to the communities most in need are often small, under-resourced organizations that will face cash flow challenges under a reimbursement model.

We would recommend:

- **Release already secured federal funds to provide digital inclusion grants to local providers in 2025.** *The State has already secured two sources of funding for digital equity and inclusion programs that promote tech adoption through device access and tech education but despite being secured and reappropriated several years ago, these funds still have not been made available. We are seeking immediate advocacy support to release these funds and to drive these resources into local communities through the New York State Digital Equity Network members and coalitions. The New York State Digital Equity Network is a loosely affiliated network of Digital Equity Coalitions and digital equity-focused non-profit organizations across the state. The funds are as follows:*
- *Ask the State to Distribute Digital Inclusion Program Funding. In the 2021-22 Budget \$15 Million was included in the AID to Localities through NY State Education Department. This funding was specifically for digital inclusion programs. Eligible entities shall include local governments, not-for-profit organizations, municipal housing authorities, school districts, boards of cooperative education services, libraries and library systems and other community-based organizations. This money has continued to be re-appropriated by never distributed.*
- *\$10 Million secured through Capital Projects Funds in 2022 to be distributed through ConnectALL*

Over the past two years, the DOL's employer surveys and job seeker data have consistently highlighted digital skills as one of the most in-demand competencies for today's workforce. As technology continues to advance, proficiency in digital tools is not just a competitive advantage but a necessity for both employees and job seekers. However, as we invest in emerging technologies like AI and quantum computing, we must also ensure that our most vulnerable communities are not left behind. Without intentional efforts to build digital literacy and accessibility, these advancements risk further widening the disparity gap, deepening economic and workforce inequalities. To create a truly inclusive digital economy, we must prioritize investments in foundational digital skills alongside innovation in cutting-edge technologies.

Included in my testimony is information regarding one of our trainees and his journey with CanCode. N.T.'s journey with CanCode Communities is a powerful testament to our impact. As a military veteran and person of color, N.T. faced eight years of unemployment. He discovered our workforce development and software developer training program in Albany and began to thrive. However, during his training, his computer unexpectedly broke, leaving him without a crucial tool for success. This situation inspired our innovative laptop lending program, which provides individuals like N.T. with computers and hotspot internet access.

N.T.'s journey was marked by resilience and determination. After completing our workforce training program, he joined a globally recognized consulting company as a software development apprentice, starting with a salary of approximately \$40,000. Today, just four years later, N.T. earns over \$100,000, showcasing the extraordinary economic mobility our participants can achieve with the digital training and resources necessary to succeed in a digital economy.

N.T.'s story is just one example of the transformative power of our work at CanCode Communities. We don't merely bridge the digital divide; we create economic impact in people's lives, as evidenced by stories like N.T.'s that inspire hope, drive economic growth, and break down barriers to opportunity.

If you have any additional questions, do not hesitate to contact Katie Hohman, Partner at Plummer, Wigger & Hohman, katie-hohman@pwh-llc.com