

November 21, 2023

Eric Frederick
Chief Connectivity Officer
Michigan High-Speed Internet Office (MIHI)
105 W. Allegan Street
Lansing, MI 48933

Dear Mr. Frederick:

The Broadband Equity, Adoption, and Deployment (BEAD) Program represents a generational opportunity to close Michigan's digital divide. We are writing to affirm the critical role of digital skills in getting unconnected Michiganders online, and to urge the Michigan High-Speed Internet Office to do its utmost to make the digital skills-related plans laid out in Volume II of its BEAD Initial Proposal come to fruition.

Since its founding in 2000, National Skills Coalition's research, organizing, and advocacy has helped change hundreds of state and federal skill development policies based on what has been effective in local communities. Together with the undersigned coalition members and allies, we recognize the BEAD Program is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to invest in and scale digital skill development initiatives.

Today, 92% of job openings require digital skills¹ – and this share will only increase as technological progress continues to transform every sector of our economy. Yet nearly one-third of American workers haven't had an opportunity to build foundational digital skills.² Closing this digital *skill* divide is a prerequisite for building the workforce Michigan needs to compete in a global, connected economy – and for narrowing the state's digital divide.

Almost two-thirds of Michigan households who don't use the internet at home cite a lack of interest as the biggest reason why.³ Michigan won't make much progress expanding broadband adoption without sustained, well-resourced digital skill building initiatives to help unconnected individuals better understand why and how they can get online.

The BEAD Program rightly defines as its top priority the deployment of high-speed networks to unserved and underserved communities. However, the \$1.56 billion Michigan will receive from the BEAD Program allows for significant investments in closing the digital divide – including skill development efforts – even after resolving the state's deployment gaps.

We are pleased that the draft plan prioritizes connecting unserved and underserved areas. To advance the state's digital inclusion goals, we think the next priority should be investing in community anchor institutions' efforts to expand home broadband adoption and provide Michiganders with the digital skills training required to succeed in today's workforce. This would do more to close the state's digital divide than using BEAD funds to build duplicative fiber lines to buildings in neighborhoods that already have fast internet service available.

Network infrastructure alone won't solve Michigan's digital divide. Fast, reliable, and universally accessible networks are necessary, but not sufficient. This historic, one-time infusion of BEAD funding is an unprecedented opportunity to go upstream and address root causes of the digital divide – starting with the digital skill divide. MIHI should seize this opportunity to invest in digital skills training infrastructure across the state, from K-12 schools and community colleges to neighborhood non-profits and on-the-job workplace training sites.

We would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and discuss further the ways in which Michigan's BEAD allocation can be leveraged to accelerate digital upskilling and build a more inclusive and prepared workforce.

Sincerely,

AAADO

Achieving the Dream

Advanced Technology Academy

Barry County Chamber & Economic Development Alliance

Corporation for a Skilled Workforce

Detroit Green Skills Alliance

Employer Resource Network USA

Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit

Grand Rapids Chamber

GST Michigan Works!

The International Institute of Metropolitan Detroit, Inc

Kent County Essential Needs Task Force (ENTF)

Latin Americans United for Progress

LISC Detroit

Metrics Reporting, Inc.

Michigan Association of Community & Adult Education

Michigan Community College Association

Michigan League for Public Policy

Michigan Manufacturers Association

Michigan Works!

Michigan Works! Northeast Consortium

Michigan Works! West Central

Minority Freedom Community Fund

MiSide

Oakland County Michigan Works!

Oakland Literacy Council

Praeco Skills, LLC

SEMCA (Southeast Michigan Community Alliance)

SER Metro-Detroit

TalentFirst

United Way for Southeastern Michigan

US Partnership for Education for Sustainable Development

West Michigan Works!

¹ Nationals Skills Coalition & the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta: "[Closing the Digital Skill Divide: The Payoff for Workers, Business, and the Economy](#)," by Amanda Bergson-Shilcock and Roderick Taylor with Nye Hodge, February 2023.

² National Skills Coalition: "[The New Landscape of Digital Literacy](#)," by Amanda Bergson-Shilcock, May 2020.

³ National Telecommunications and Information Administration: "[Digital Nation Data Explorer](#)," October 5, 2022. 63.8% of Michigan households without any home internet users cite "Don't Need or Not Interested" as the main reason.