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January 13, 2026

Committee on Education and the Workforce
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representative:

On behalf of the 1.4 million members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), I write to share AFSCME’s priorities related to artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace in advance of the January 14 House Education and the Workforce Committee hearing entitled, “Building an AI-Ready America.” As the committee considers this issue, I want to underscore the importance of ensuring that the benefits of AI are distributed equitably and that workers are not displaced or disempowered by the adoption of AI in the workplace.

To that end, AI policy should include guardrails to:

- safeguard workers’ voice on the job and involvement in decisions about the use of AI in the workplace
- ensure that AI contributes to, rather than detracts from, job quality by limiting its use to instances in which it complements, not replaces, workers
- prevent and mitigate job displacement through workforce training in new AI-driven opportunities and provide upskilling and benefits, including income replacement, for workers whose jobs are affected
- prevent AI from being used to de-skill public service work and privatize public sector jobs
- protect workers’ civil rights and liberties, including freedom from workplace surveillance and discrimination
- prohibit the use of AI to undermine workers’ rights to engage in union activity
- ensure that employment-related decisions are made by humans
- mitigate the risk of misinformation and disinformation by requiring ethical guidelines and transparency regarding the use of AI-generated content
- provide oversight and accountability about the use of AI in the workplace and its impact on workers
- protect against the misuse of AI in public benefits programs, as addressed below.

The use of AI in public benefits programs, including in work support programs, poses particular challenges for people who rely on those programs and the public servants who administer them. Risks posed by AI use in these programs must be carefully considered and the implementation of AI must be accompanied by substantial guardrails to prevent harms, including the displacement and disempowerment of workers and wrongful determinations of benefits eligibility. When AI has been used to displace eligibility specialists who make rights-impacting determinations about public benefits, all too often this has disastrous consequences in terms of wrongful denials of benefits that are a lifeline for low-income people. Ensuring that such decisions are ultimately overseen by a trained public employee is crucial to sustaining the integrity of public benefits programs, preventing outsourcing and privatization of fundamental aspects of public programs, and preserving due process protections.

Recently, Big Tech has pushed an effort to convince Congress to preempt state laws that regulate AI. Unregulated AI can have disastrous consequences for workers, consumers and families. The AI industry is still nascent, and its full potential and pitfalls are not yet known. It would be profoundly short-sighted to preempt worker, consumer and environmental protections that are obviously needed now and for which future needs will undoubtedly arise as AI continues to develop. With AI bills now introduced or AI laws enacted in nearly every state, preempting state laws would also undermine the will of the people and states' authority.

Like any technological advancement, AI comes with great risk if not managed properly. Therefore, as this committee debates AI policy, we urge you to keep the impact on working people front and center in your deliberations. Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth S. Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Elizabeth S. Watson
Director of Federal Government Affairs

ESW/AT:dmg