

Testimony of Antonio “Tony” Barlow
Before the Committee on Education and Workforce
Hearing on “Building an AI-Ready America: How AI Is Creating Opportunities Across
America's Workforce”
July 24, 2026

Good morning Chairman Walberg, Congresswoman McBath and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Tony Barlow. I am the Vice President of CWA Local 3204 and I am an outside plant technician for AT&T in Atlanta, Georgia.

Workers across the country have seen employers racing to adopt new Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. Without guardrails in place for AI design and implementation, it has the potential to displace workers, degrade job quality and undermine service quality. That is why it is crucial that workers have a voice in how this technology is used in the workplace.

At the call centers in my Local, we have seen AI tools used to monitor workers, speed up work, take away the ability to respond to customer needs, automate customer service functions that reduce headcount, and create stressful workplace environments.

This is not just happening locally. CWA call center workers nationwide report that AI tools are designed to automate both frontline tasks like note-taking and management functions like scheduling, training, and performance evaluations. In a 2023 survey, nearly 3,000 CWA call center members reported AI tools negatively impact their job quality. Most respondents felt AI-automated feedback tools increase stress and do not make work fairer, easier, or more interesting, nor do they improve customer service. The survey also found that increased AI use sped up work, expanded monitoring and discipline linked to surveillance, increased workplace stress, and lowered job satisfaction.

For example, AI tools will analyze calls in real time, providing instant feedback to managers on aspects of customer interactions. These tools claim to measure things such as tone of voice, speaking pace, and workers’ following of call scripts. But they have proven to be flawed, sometimes failing to track conversations properly or exhibiting bias in evaluating workers. I’ve heard from my members and other call center workers that these measurements can be biased against workers of color or certain speech styles, such as a southern accent.

Telecom technicians working on the network in the field and providing service at customers’ homes are similarly being monitored and kept to tight schedules through real-time tracking of their location through GPS and increasingly are directed throughout their day by automated routing tools.

It doesn't have to be this way. AI can be used to empower workers, building their skills and improving their ability to perform the uniquely human aspects of their job, but only if workers have a voice in the development and implementation of AI systems.

Working in a call center as a customer service agent takes real skill. It's a talent to convince a frustrated customer to not only retain their service but also buy another service. Agents have the talent and ability to identify a customer's needs and find out solutions, but AI can rob workers of their power to use the knowledge and skills to solve problems. The job becomes more about sticking to a script. For years, our employers have been attempting to use technology to deskill our jobs and replace us with lower paid non-union contractors. Only through collective bargaining have we protected our jobs and placed limits on outsourcing.

I think that there are some immediate steps that Congress can take to make sure that AI is used properly. I urge Congress to pass the No Robot Bosses Act, which would prohibit employers from making hiring, firing and disciplinary decisions on the basis of automated software without the input of a human. We're lucky to have a collective bargaining agreement that helps protect us, but no worker should face threats to their livelihood on the basis of AI decisions that may be illegal, discriminatory, or simply incorrect.

I also believe that Congress should pass the Keep Call Centers in America Act. One key part of this bill would give customers the right to be transferred to an actual person rather than talking to an AI agent. This would both improve customer service and ensure smoother processes for agents by decreasing customer frustration.

As the father of three daughters and one son, all in college, I urge Congress to take the time to get AI policy right. The policies enacted will affect not only my own children but also working families across the country for years to come. These policies will determine whether families can secure a good job, support their families, build financial stability, and pursue fulfilling lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I look forward to any questions that you may have.