

# NAACP

## *New York State Conference*

### **Testimony of Rahnold Thomas, Chair, Tech & Innovation Committee NAACP New York State Conference**

**January 15, 2025**

Good afternoon,

My name is Rahnold Thomas and I serve as the *Chair of the Tech and Innovation Committee* for the NAACP New York State Conference. I bring over two decades of experience in technology and digital transformation, including leading complex digital systems and advising Fortune 500 organizations on responsible and inclusive technology strategies.

I am here today, on behalf of the NAACP New York State Conference, to express our support for the proposed legislation and to highlight the State Conference's priorities that this body should consider as we advance legislation that seeks to establish thoughtful governance around artificial intelligence (AI) systems in New York State.

#### **NAACP Supports Intentionally Regulating AI**

The NAACP has long recognized that emerging technologies carry both enormous promise and profound risk. We acknowledge AI's potential to improve outcomes, deliver efficiencies, and solve problems that have long plagued society. However, without guardrails, AI also risks replicating historical biases and widening disparities. The NAACP advocates for equitable representation in AI datasets, accountability in decision-making systems, and governance frameworks that protect civil rights and civil liberties.

In a 2024 Resolution, the NAACP outlined these priorities and tasked its members to ensure our advocacy around this issue incorporates this nuance accepting that while AI “represents a significant advancement in technology, influencing various sectors including healthcare, education, labor, criminal justice, media, and electioneering, with the potential to reshape these fields dramatically...” we must “recognize(s) the critical need to ensure that AI technologies promote inclusivity and equity, particularly in protecting the civil rights of African Americans and ensuring their fair representation in AI-driven processes”.

This legislation's emphasis on transparency and oversight for AI decision-making frameworks aligns with these organizational priorities. It is critical that both public and private sector use of AI be observable, explainable, and auditable so that all New Yorkers can trust how decisions that affect their lives are made.

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Our support for this legislation stems not only from its protective dimensions but also from its recognition of AI's utility. Too often, regulatory frameworks are framed as a barrier to innovation. That must not be the case here. The greatest utility of AI lies in solving complex problems and improving the efficiency and efficacy of both government operations and private enterprise. It can help optimize public health responses, tailor educational supports, streamline social services, and elevate small business operations if designed and governed well.

Therefore, as we consider regulatory schemes, we must strike a balance that protects individuals from discriminatory outcomes without stifling the technology's ability to create opportunity and serve communities efficiently. Regulatory frameworks should support the innovation that delivers measurable public good. This bill wisely frames decision-making standards in ways that aim to ensure fairness without impeding beneficial applications of AI.

### **Preparing the Workforce and Embracing Entrepreneurship**

As AI transforms the labor market, we must also prioritize community re-skilling and workforce readiness. Technological adoption should be paired with robust training, upskilling, and educational opportunities targeted at historically underrepresented communities. This work is essential for equitable economic participation. We urge the Legislature to integrate robust plans for workforce development that ensure New Yorkers are not left behind as AI reshapes industries.

Additionally, AI's integration into commerce and daily life will *fuel entrepreneurial enterprise*. New businesses, primarily startups harnessing automated tools, will emerge throughout the state. We must create an environment that supports these enterprises through access to capital, technical resources, and policy certainty. Promoting small business innovation, especially among Black and brown entrepreneurs, needs to be a part of this conversation if the goal is economic inclusivity.

### **Conclusion**

This legislation represents a thoughtful approach to AI governance that recognizes both the potential to combat harmful bias and the importance of promoting transparency, innovation, and opportunity. The NAACP New York State Conference supports this effort and looks forward to being a part of the process as this bill is debated and considered.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.