The STEM Alliance and NYS ConnectALL Host Digital Equity Listening Session

Purchase, NY - On Friday, March 24th, The STEM Alliance and Empire State Development's ConnectALL Office partnered to host a free Regional Listening Session on the topic of digital equity. Held at the SUNY Purchase College campus, the event gathered critical stakeholders including nonprofits, internet service providers, business leaders and elected officials. In both large group sessions and smaller breakout rooms, attendees discussed opportunities and challenges related to accessing the internet, owning computing devices and receiving basic tech education. Trained facilitators and notetakers gathered the opinions and thoughts of attendees to serve as critical input for the writing of the State Digital Equity plan - a plan that will bring millions of dollars of federal investments to our State to bridge the digital divide.

As the lead organizer, The STEM Alliance promoted the event widely across the Mid-Hudson Regional Economic Development Council (REDC) area to ensure that the event was inclusive, capturing opinions from residents and leaders across Westchester, Dutchess, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, Sullivan, and Ulster counties. Planning partners for the event included Mercy College, Mid-Hudson Library Systems, Southeastern New York Library Resources Council, Ramapo Catskill Library, Westchester County Association and Westchester Library Systems.

In total, over 140 attendees participated either online or in person. Participants raised critical issues around basic inequalities such as one attendee who said, "In multi-unit dwellings like apartment houses, sometimes there simply is no internet wiring. It's like an internet desert." Or, another nonprofit leader who said, "I know a middle aged man who was just too ashamed to admit that he didn't know how to use a computer and that really limits his work options."

Empire State Development President, CEO and Commissioner Hope Knight said, "Digital equity is key to giving all New Yorkers access to jobs and educational opportunities, and to growing the New York State economy. Thank you to the STEM Alliance and to the New York State ConnectALL team for hosting this important listening session, and for making sure that the region's diverse community members were involved in learning about our efforts to improve internet reach and availability for everyone."

State Assemblyman Steve Otis (91st AD Westchester), a leading proponent of digital equity programs congratulated the Empire State Development's ConnectALL team and The STEM Alliance for the outstanding digital equity regional meeting saying, "We know how to close the digital divide. It can be accomplished by funding community-based programs. The best path to success is to work with libraries, schools, senior citizen programs, community action groups, STEM programs, labor unions, business groups and any local organization that already serves individuals excluded from digital literacy because

of economic status, age, race or other barriers. Congratulations to all participants, each of whom made this an enriching and valuable discussion."

In closing, STEM Alliance President Margaret Käufer summarized the event saying, "This regional listening session is a great first step. From here, we need to build coalitions of digital inclusion advocates, gather data, grow County and local digital equity plans alongside the State efforts and then make the investments necessary to close this gap. We need to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in our digitally driven world. The time for digital equity is now."

Photo Caption: STEM Alliance President Margaret Käufer with event speakers: Assemblyman Steve Otis, Mid-Hudson Regional Director at Empire State Development Thomas Scaglione, Microsoft Client Executive Jodia Vanel, and ConnectALL's Senior Vice President Joshua Breitbart.

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About ConnectALL
The mission of Empire State Development's ConnectALL is to build New York State's digital infrastructure and connect all New Yorkers through the internet. The ConnectALL Office oversees the statewide digital equity plan and administers over $1 billion in public investments across the state.

For more information on ConnectALL and efforts to promote digital equity and interest access in the state, visit https://broadband.ny.gov/.

About The STEM Alliance
The STEM Alliance is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that works to bridge systemic gaps in education to provide equal access to critical science, technology, engineering and math learning resources with the goal of empowering communities, inspiring innovation and creating opportunity for all. With STEM jobs expanding at an accelerated pace, there is high demand for skilled graduates. The STEM Alliance is growing the next generation of STEM leaders by creating a community where all are empowered to embrace STEM as a means of solving problems and fostering innovation.

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