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OFFICIAL PRESS STATEMENT

By Rev. Dr. Wendell Anthony

THE COMMUNITY DIGITAL CONNECTION!

DETROIT – Today we are pleased to be connected to Citizen Verizon, a program and business plan to advance environmental, social, and economic equity. For 114 years, the NAACP has been focused on equity of opportunity. Education has been and continues to be one of the hallmark pillars for the oldest civil rights organization in the country. This \$100,000 award through the Verizon Forward Community Enhancement Program will help to provide digital unity in our community. We are proud and excited about this partnership with Verizon and a host of community organizations. Verizon, through its very mission, has indicated the importance of the inspirational role of their company in enhancing lives. There is a great need for digital literacy and connectivity for seniors, returning citizens, and even students and families within our community. As we were successful in providing 51,000 laptops for K-12 students in the city of Detroit with a number of community partners three years ago, we found that a laptop with no connectivity to get to the top will still leave many at the bottom. We therefore had to pursue building networks that would work to connect students inside the city. In 2019, a city report revealed that 35.6% of households in Detroit lacked access to broad band internet. Our community cannot afford to leave behind any segment of its populace due to economic disadvantage or lack of access to technology. We all have a stake in establishing a true pathway towards digital inclusion.

The workforce for the future must be able to cross over the digital divide. Jobs reflecting network engineering, graphic design, cybersecurity, and web design are all imperatives for the future. Yet even more basic is the necessity for small business development and enhancement. If we are to grow and expand these opportunities, then we must close the digital divide. I am excited about the potential participation from churches, non-profits, and community organizations. These partners will help to equip seniors, formerly incarcerated, and others in the areas of health care, banking, social services, employment opportunities and so much more. We believe that this program is needed now more than ever before. Our ETA in this case does not stand for estimated time of arrival. Rather, it is clear that the time is now, and the purpose is most critical. Verizon has now landed in the heart of our community. It is called the Detroit Branch NAACP's Education, Training, and Access Program or ETA. We are inviting everyone to get onboard as we connect our way to the future.

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