Data centers in our rural communities

Nearly 90 percent of existing data centers are in urban areas—but nearly 70 percent of planned data centers are slated for rural areas. The AFT's and the AFL-CIO's position is clear: If rural communities are about to bear the brunt of the data centers' impact—from strains on water and power to the potential loss of jobs and land—AI companies need to step up. That means paying their fair share, hiring union labor, bargaining in good faith and mitigating environmental and health impacts.

The bottom line

AI companies shouldn't get carte blanche to build data centers in rural communities without taking responsibility for the impact.

What the AFT and the AFL-CIO are advocating for

- **Union jobs.** We're calling for data centers to be built, operated and maintained here in the United States with union labor.
- **Data centers should pay their own way.** Right now, many data centers get big tax breaks. We're demanding they pay their fair share of energy and water costs, and that any tax exemptions come with strings attached: fair labor standards, transparency and claw-back provisions if a company doesn't hold up its end of the bargain.
- **Protect working families from rising utility bills.** Data centers are putting significant strain on electricity, and electricity bills are already rising. We're fighting to make sure that those costs don't get passed on to working families and that AI companies transition as quickly as possible to renewable energy.
- **Transparency and a seat at the table.** Data center operators should have to disclose their impact, engage with unions and local communities, and answer to state and local decision-makers.
- **A tax on the profits.** AI is generating enormous profits for a small number of tech companies. We're calling for a "tech tax" on data center operations and AI-driven profits, with that revenue directed toward public education, workforce retraining, healthcare, housing and infrastructure—the things our communities actually need.
- **Oversight.** Independent of data centers, the warnings about the potential harm of AI on our social and emotional well-being are stark, especially when it comes to our children. If AI companies want to operate in our communities, they need to be regulated at the local, state and federal levels to ensure AI supports human relationships, expands opportunity and protects democracy.

This brief reflects positions adopted in the AFT's 2026 resolution "Preparing for the Age of Artificial Intelligence: Protecting Democracy, Workers, Students and the Planet," and the AFL-CIO's 2026 resolution, "We Want Good Jobs Today and Tomorrow."