

# Comment of The Last Mile

Public Interest Comment on the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) Dual Use Foundation Artificial Intelligence Models with Widely Available Model Weights Request for Public Input

**Author:** Jacob Briggs

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important matter.

My name is Jacob Briggs, and I serve as the Senior Manager of Education at The Last Mile (TLM). My journey with TLM began during my incarceration, where I was introduced to the transformative power of technology through TLM's comprehensive full-stack coding boot camp. This experience drastically changed my life, reshaped my career trajectory, and cemented my path to becoming a justice-impacted returned citizen with a profound commitment to tech education.

Upon my release, I leveraged the skills I learned in TLM's program to embark on a career as a successful software engineer. My dedication to the field and continuous pursuit of knowledge in the ever-evolving domain of software engineering culminated in a transition back to TLM, this time as a leader and innovator. In my current role, I have the privilege of overseeing the educational strategy and helping to develop a curriculum with a focus on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML), areas I am deeply passionate about.

Committed to staying at the forefront of technological advancements, I have engaged in extensive study, exploring subjects such as Artificial Intelligence, Large Language Model architecture, machine learning, deep learning, and prompt engineering. These endeavors have informed my recent work on TLM's Machine Learning curriculum, which introduces our students to TensorFlow, a cutting-edge, open-source ML framework. This curriculum is designed to empower our students to integrate advanced ML models and concepts into their web development projects, fostering a practical understanding of AI's potential to transform the digital landscape.

It is a privilege to be a part of this community and I am committed to furthering TLM's mission of unlocking the potential within each of our program participants, equipping them with the skills and confidence to navigate and excel in the ever-evolving tech industry.

**This comment is most relevant to questions 3(c) and 9 of the Request for Public Input.**

## The Last Mile's Vision and Impact

The Last Mile's mission is to provide opportunities for personal and professional growth for justice-impacted individuals through education and technology training. We endeavor to stop the cycle of incarceration, reduce recidivism, lower the level of taxpayer money spent on incarceration, and produce exceptional employees.

At the classroom level, our work involves using the most advanced online training and education techniques, professional instructors, and results-driven management to produce engineers, developers, and many other workforce-ready professionals. Our curriculum currently encompasses two primary areas of instruction: Web Development and Audio/Video Production. To complement these foundational programs and broaden the skill set of our students, we are in the process of introducing a comprehensive machine learning curriculum. By integrating machine learning into our educational offerings, we are committed to ensuring our students have access to cutting-edge technologies and the tools necessary to thrive.

At the organizational level, our work involves partnerships with state government Corrections officials, corporations, funding sources, community groups, and public figures who have joined our cause. Together we have created an incarceration-to-work program that has become a model in 7 states.

## Impact of Open Source Software on Equity in Criminal Justice

The intersection of technology education and criminal justice reform offers a unique vantage point to assess the societal impacts of open-source AI and ML platforms. We sincerely hope that our comment helps underscore the imperative for legislative frameworks to actively support and promote the availability of open-source artificial

intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML) technologies. This advocacy stems from a recognition of the profound impact that such tools can have on fostering equity, inclusion, and innovation within the realm of technology education, especially for marginalized communities.

The flexibility to modify and distribute open-source software solutions empowers TLM to offer relevant, practical skills despite operating in a constrained environment. Open-source tools also eliminate the financial barriers associated with proprietary software, ensuring that cutting-edge technology education is accessible to all, regardless of economic background. This aspect is particularly relevant to TLM's mission to provide education and technology training to justice-impacted individuals.

The learning environments for our program are situated within correctional institutions, where our students have no access to the internet. This constraint prevents them from engaging in real-time online interactions or utilizing web-based resources that are essential for contemporary software development, including interaction with closed-source AI models. We have chosen TensorFlow for our students because it enables us to host a single, comprehensive file on our Content Delivery Network (CDN), thereby simplifying student access to the full suite of TensorFlow.js functionalities.

This accessibility is crucial for facilitating seamless learning experiences. Unfortunately, this level of ease and integration cannot be replicated with closed-source software, as their licensing and distribution constraints prevent the straightforward hosting and distribution necessary for our unique learning environment. This approach ensures that our students have the necessary resources at their disposal to learn and apply the latest technologies in web application development, thereby equipping them with the skills needed to build state-of-the-art digital solutions.

We believe that legislation should aim to encourage the development and use of open-source technologies and that policies that promote the creation and utilization of open-source AI and ML platforms can foster innovation and inclusion across diverse sectors and underserved populations. Allocating resources to support open-source initiatives can enhance the quality, security, and sustainability of these platforms, benefiting a wide variety of educational programs.

## Conclusion

The Last Mile (TLM) stands at the forefront of an audacious movement, aiming to transform the lives of justice-impacted individuals through the power of education and

technology training. Our core mission is to create pathways for personal and professional growth, thereby breaking the cycle of incarceration, reducing recidivism, minimizing the financial burden on taxpayers, and cultivating a talent pool of exceptional employees ready to contribute meaningfully to the workforce.

In the realm of education, TLM harnesses advanced online training methodologies, employs professional instructors, and leverages results-oriented management strategies to nurture the next generation of engineers, developers, and other professionals equipped for the modern workforce. Our curriculum, focusing on Web Development and Audio/Video Production, is currently undergoing expansion to include a comprehensive machine learning component. This initiative is designed to ensure that our students are not only proficient in foundational digital skills but are also versed in the latest technological innovations, thereby enhancing their competitiveness in the job market.

At an organizational level, TLM's success is a testament to the power of collaboration. Our partnerships with state corrections officials, corporations, funding bodies, community organizations, and public figures have paved the way for an incarceration-to-employment pipeline that serves as a beacon of hope and innovation in seven states across the nation. These collaborations underscore our commitment to community, sincerity, and audacity, as we collectively strive to forge a more equitable and just society.

The advocacy for open-source AI and ML technologies is deeply intertwined with our vision of educational equity and inclusion. By championing the use of open-source platforms, we aim to remove financial barriers to technology education, making cutting-edge tools and knowledge accessible to all students, particularly those from marginalized communities. The decision to integrate TensorFlow into our curriculum is a strategic one, reflecting our dedication to providing our students with the most accessible and innovative resources available. Open-source software, with its adaptability and cost-effectiveness, is pivotal in our efforts to democratize technology education within the restrictive settings of correctional facilities.

As we reflect on the impact of open-source software in the realm of criminal justice and education, it is evident that such tools are indispensable in fostering an inclusive and equitable digital landscape. The potential of these technologies to drive societal change is immense, and it is incumbent upon policymakers to recognize and support the development of open-source AI and ML platforms. By doing so, they can ensure that the benefits of technological progress are widely distributed, helping to level the playing field for individuals across all levels of society.

In conclusion, TLM's deliberate choice to embrace TensorFlow and other open-source technologies is a clear indication of our belief in the transformative power of education and technology. This approach not only aligns with our mission to support justice-impacted individuals but also sets a precedent for the kind of innovative, inclusive, and equitable practices that should define the future of technology education. It is our hope that lawmakers and stakeholders will continue to support and promote the proliferation of open-source technologies, thereby ensuring that the digital future is accessible and beneficial to everyone, regardless of their background or circumstances.