[INSERT DATE]

The Honorable Kay Ivey, Governor

Alabama State House

600 Dexter Avenue

Montgomery, AL 36130

***RE: Support for a Challenger Center – STEM Learning Initiative – in Etowah County***

Dear Governor Ivey:

I am pleased to support a grassroots initiative arising from concerned citizens in Northeast Alabama who want to bring a ***Challenger Learning Center*** to the state. As the name infers, these centers are an outgrowth of the Challenger Space Shuttle disaster in 1986. The intent of programs offered at a Center is to ignite interest in STEM fields and increase a child’s confidence in pursuing those fields. As we all know, the future job market in our state will require a STEM background. In addition, the industries we are recruiting to our state today and in the future, will desire a skilled workforce. I am writing to urge your support in funding the development of this project through the state budget, and finding a way to sustain funding to ensure that all students are able to participate in this high-tech, high-touch learning experience.

The Challenger Program is a global initiative and operates as a franchise model. Currently, there are 44 centers in 27 states and 3 countries. The curriculum for each space mission is written by NASA and vetted against each state’s science and math curriculum to ensure relevance and continuity in education. This training augments the classroom by applying concepts and principles in an exciting, realistic space environment. Strong partnerships with K-12 are forged to ensure that attendance is equitable, distributed across school systems and includes all students. As we work to diversify our workforce, we believe a Challenger Center will provide equal opportunity to young students who will be our future astronauts, engineers, pilots, health care workers, machinists, industrial analysts, electricians, etc.

We are seeking $6 million from the state budget to launch this project. Those funds will cover the costs associated with construction/renovation of a physical location (approximately 10,000 square feet), purchase of a NASA approved simulator, furnishings, equipment, exhibits, and a 10% contingency. The simulator is the heart of the training center and houses a briefing room (where 5-8th grade students are introduced to the mission), a mission control center where the ground crew works with those in space to solve STEM problems and conduct lab experiments related to real-world issues, a shuttle for transport into space, and a spacecraft! Once this phase is completed, we are requesting sustained funding for operation (approximately $350,000) which will allow our school systems to participate without cost as well as cover a portion of staff salaries and overhead.

Our future workforce is in the school system today! Consistent with our emphasis on pre-K education, the Alabama Reading Initiative, and dual enrollment, this state is interested in investing in the future of our children. Planting a Challenger Center in our state sends a message to our citizens and current/future industry. We intend to prepare a workforce ready to solve the difficult issues we will encounter as our world evolves. While emphasizing STEM education, we will be augmenting essential work skills e.g., teamwork, critical thinking, problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. I fully support and endorse this project!

Sincerely,