



**Proponent Testimony in support of HB 492
Ohio Women's Business Enterprise Certification**

**Before the Ohio House State and Local Government Committee
Chairwoman Marlene Anielski**

**Provided by Merry Korn, Pearl Interactive Network
May 15, 2018**

Chair Anielski, Vice-Chair Hambley, Ranking Member Holmes and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, my name is Merry Korn and I am the CEO of Pearl Interactive Network. Our business is a social enterprise that delivers program management contact center staffing and tele-health services (client-site or virtual) — tapping a workforce of skilled and talented agents nationwide. What makes us unique is the workforce we tap: skilled and talented disabled veterans, veterans, military spouses, people with disabilities, and people living in geographically-challenged areas.

We employ over 500 employees in Ohio and 19 other states across the country. We have another contract with Census that will include hiring between 750 to 1,000 employees. Our business is built on a people-driven culture. Whether it's taking our own funds and investing in a bus to transport employees or holding employee appreciation days, Pearl offers employees a supportive, family-like environment.

I am here today to offer enthusiastic support for House Bill 492, which would create a Women's Business Enterprise (WBE) Certification program in Ohio. As I mentioned before we have employees in 20 states and we do business in 40 states across the country. With the Women

Owned certification in Ohio, I could create more jobs and generate far greater tax income to this state.

A great challenge that we encounter regularly when trying to compete for government contracts outside of Ohio is that other states deny us and other Ohio women-owned companies from being eligible for certification as WBE's because we are not certified in our "home state"; AND Ohio does not have certification reciprocity with other states with our current certification programs. Certification in our "home state" is not an option because Ohio does not have a state WBE program.

HB 492 would solve this problem by creating a certification program that simply sets up a process to certify WBE's and places them on a public website. It also allows the Department of Administrative Services to enter into reciprocal agreements with other states that have similar programs. I have demonstrated the ability to procure large federal contracts. Not being able to procure state contracts is the glass ceiling for myself and my peers who are fellow women business owners. The state of Ohio wins with the passage of HB 492 because we are headquartered here and we will grow by gaining access to contracts across the country. We are creating jobs for some of our states most economically challenged individuals, we generate taxes, and our state would truly speak to creating opportunities for skilled, talented and deserving women business owners.

Chair Anielski and member of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 492. I urge your favorable consideration of the bill and I am happy to answer any questions at this time.