

Buenos Dias.

Chairman Edwards, Vice-Chair Powell, Ranking Member Upchurch, and members of the House Economic and Workforce Development Committee, I am Jenice Contreras, Executive Director for the Northeast Ohio Hispanic Center for Economic Development, thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony on Senate Bill 105.

As the only stand alone Latino SBDC in the state of Ohio, our organization provides culturally competent and linguistically appropriate technical assistance and business support to entrepreneurs. Ensuring MBE/WBC certifications is one of the many areas we assist business owners with and yet an area that often entrepreneurs shy away from due to the complexity, labor intensive and multiple bodies one must obtain certifications from. Just in Cleveland, one business owner would need to be certified by the City, the County, the Regional Transit Authority, the Sewer District, and if interested in regional or statewide opportunities, there would be a fifth certification from DAS. While each certification process may vary slightly, most documents required are duplicative, not to mention annual certifications renewal process. How many times does a small business owner need to provide evidence that they are Black or Latino or Female or Veteran owned business?

Senate Bill 105 would streamline the process for business owners by having one statewide recognized and accepted MBE/WBE/VBE certification. In addition to reducing the number of times and red tape that business owners would need to go through this process, it will also encourage greater participation of the state certification program which ultimately would lead to granting MBE/WBE/VBE's greater contracts and opportunity. This bill is a long time coming. For decades the small business community has urged the multiple certifying bodies to streamline this process. While there have been many attempts, none have been successful.

With the passing of this bill, I also recommend for DAS to improve its efficiencies, outreach, and customer service to facilitate the certification process for business owners. COVID 19 has amplified the need for government serving entities to improve antiquated and bureaucratic processes to make services and opportunities difficult to access. We will still have a lot of work to do but Senate Bill 105 is a start in the right direction.

Again, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony on SB 105.

Jenice Contreras
Executive Director, NEOHCED