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Testimony in Support of SB 105  
Before the Senate Small Business and Economic Opportunity Committee.  
**YVONNE CHERELL, FREEMAN FOCUS MANAGEMENT, INC.**  
**NAWBO COLUMBUS**  
March 23, 2021

Chairman Rulli, Vice-Chair Lang, Ranking Member Sykes and members.

My name is Yvonne Cherell. I am the Founder & Principal Consultant of Freeman Focus Management, Inc. We are a contract group providing organization and project management services for nonprofit organizations. For more than 25 years, I managed a successful career in the non-profit sector. And even with great achievements and trailblazing so many firsts in my journey, it has not always been a linear path for me. In 2015, changes in my personal compelled me to entrepreneurship. With the support of family, friends, and colleagues, I took command of my destiny and became my own Boss. I am what is known as a “solopreneur” which means, I run my business independently, without the support of a co-founder or W-2 employees. I perform all the duties related to my business. However, to a I belong to a community of other “solopreneurs” and we trade experts and services to acquire larger joint contracts and projects in the community.

I am honored to speak before you today as a member of the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO). NAWBO was established as a unified voice of America’s more than 10 million women-owned businesses. And in 1996, NAWBO Columbus was chartered and is proud of its longstanding history in the greater Columbus area. We are currently the largest chapter in the nation and pride ourselves in elevating women business owners through connections, advocacy, and mentorship. In short, we help advocate and connect women to the proper resources in our local community to help manage the challenges of their growing businesses.

I am a proponent of SB 105 and not only ask for your support and request a friendly amendment to include Women Business Enterprise certifications (also known as WBEs) and veteran owned businesses in the work to create less bureaucracy in governmental and other eligible contracts.

The current language includes provisions for MBEs with regards to eliminating barriers of being certified separately in each jurisdiction in which they are seeking to do business. This creates extraordinary levels of red tape for all businesses, especially those owned by women and veterans where other limitations to entrepreneurship already exists. Even in these contemporary times, women business owners are less likely to access funding or capital, struggle to be taken seriously and still bare the weight of balancing work life with responsibilities at home. And studies show the challenges are greater for women of color or Black women entrepreneurs.

In Central Ohio fewer than half of Ohio's women-owned businesses, 46%, were considered essential during Gov. Mike DeWine's stay-at-home order, which went into effect on March 23, 2020. As a result of COVID-19, 26% of WBO laid off or furloughed staff, reported a decrease in revenue, and canceled contracts. And reports document larger inequities and disparities for Black and women of color-led businesses. More work is needed to diversify industries, eliminate barriers, and support the country's fastest-growing entity – women-owned businesses.

One of the bright spots amid the pandemic was the creation of the Women's Business Certificate. Due to the persistent efforts of NAWBO Columbus members and others, House Bill 494 was passed making it the first of its kind of certification program for women business owners.

A recent State of Women-Owned Businesses Report confirms that 40 percent of businesses in the United States are owned by women — yet they account for only 8 percent of the total private sector workforce and contribute only 4.3 percent of total revenue. Additionally, WBE's have limited access to government contracts. At the federal level, the government finally reached a modest 5% goal of small-business contracts for women-owned businesses after being set more than 20 years ago. To quote Sheri Chaney Jones, President of Measurement Resources Company and NAWBO Columbus Public Policy Vice President, "more than 330,000 women-owned businesses across Ohio will now have access to the resources and opportunities they need to grow and scale their businesses in support of their families, their community, and Ohio's economy."

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We applaud Ohio's Secretary of State Frank LaRose for meeting with minority business leaders across the state and working with the General Assembly to create a single statewide standard to certify MBEs. We respectfully ask this committee to extend wealth equity, gender equality and the American dream to women and veteran owned business leaders as well.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this important investment program. As a Black woman business owner, I support SB 105 and look forward to the inclusion of other veterans and women business owners.

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