

Written Testimony for Senate Bill 779 by Gail Bassette

Commission on Minority– and Women–Owned Small Business Participation in State Procurement

Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I want to thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today.

Senator Griffith, I want to thank you for recognizing the need for this bill and for your continued support to the small, minority and women owned business (MWBEs) community in the State and in the Nation.

I've looked at Senate bill 779 from several advantage points and the Senator is right, this bill will give us an opportunity to explore additional ways to include more minority and women owned businesses in State procurement contracts. There has been significant progress in providing opportunities for minorities and women owned firms in the State's contracting activities and I recognize the Administration's commitment to engaging more of these firms in prime contracting opportunities with State agencies.

This Commission bill is aimed at bringing the right people around the table to conduct a comprehensive study of MWBE participation on State contracts to identify barriers that remain in the State's contracting process and to make recommendations about changes or modifications that might be needed to move forward to get the desired outcomes that the state is looking for.

I've touched the MWBE community from a number of perspectives and understand the issues first hand faced by these firms seeking to do business with the State and those who are currenting doing business with the state, as well as I understand the challenges faced by the state agencies in partnering with these firms.

I am:

- A certified MBE in the state, in business for over 20 years,
- Former Secretary of MD Department of General Services overseeing the Small Business Program, as Secretary, spearheaded the State's first Business and Entrepreneur Training Summit in collaboration with Maryland Department of Transportation
- Former Executive Director, US Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency's Federal Procurement Center, helping minority businesses around the country, gain better access to federal government contract opportunities
- Served on President Obama Administration's Interagency Task Force on Federal Contracting Opportunities for Small and Minority Businesses
- Currently, the Chief Operating Officer for Lumen Solutions, an IT Services firm, certified as a MD MBE.

The Commission will:

- Look at what Maryland has done well, what's working and what's not working,
- Look at the best and promising practices in the industry, the federal government and in other states,

- Identify regulations that have been passed that are having the most impact to support the advancement of MWBEs, and
- What laws that could be preventing MWBEs from effectively competing for State contracts

Contracting with Minority and woman owned businesses is a win-win. These firms get the revenue they need to grow their businesses, create jobs, build capacity, scale, enter new markets and contribute to the tax base. The State gets the opportunity to work with some of most innovative and nimble firms, fostering a healthy competitive business climate and creating pathways to economic empowerment for all.

Maryland is home to the highest concentration of women- and minority-owned companies in the country as well as the second highest concentration of minority-owned businesses.

This Bill is an opportunity for us to get it right and set the example to demonstrate that Maryland Is Open for Business.

For these reasons, I ask for a FAVORABLE REPORT on Senate Bill 779.