



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 5023
March 3, 2021

Co-Chair Senator Lee Beyer
Co-Chair Representative David Gomberg
Joint Ways & Means Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development
State Capitol Building
900 Court Street NE
Salem, Oregon 97301

The Hispanic Metropolitan Chamber supports HB 5023, the budget for Business Oregon, to ensure operations, services, and programs continue to help business development in Oregon, especially in underserved communities. The Hispanic Chamber is the oldest and largest culturally specific provider of technical assistance for Latino small businesses in the region. It was founded in 1993 and has been supporting the community ever since with bi-cultural and bi-lingual economic development services in both Oregon and SW Washington.

The pandemic has affected the Latino community disproportionately. While by the latest count Latinos in Oregon represent approximately 13% of the total population in Oregon, over 25% of those infected by COVID-19 have been Latinos. Even though Latino the community is highly entrepreneurial and has persisted in starting and growing small businesses to sustain itself, COVID-19 has laid bare systemic inequities in accessing resources and has further deepened the digital divide, in short making it very difficult for these businesses to survive the current crisis.

Through a program in partnership with Business Oregon last year, The Hispanic Chamber was able to amplify its efforts statewide to successfully address the difficulties experienced by Latino small businesses. Not only did we provide one on one technical assistance, but we also were able to build websites for small business and provide expert support with bookkeeping and taxes. This support allowed businesses to have a digital presence they had never had before. In these times, when an online presence is a must, it gave businesses a fighting chance to survive. Other professional services included bookkeeping and tax preparation services. This serve allowed businesses to get ready to apply for grants and loans for a much-needed working

capital infusion. Businesses of all kinds including construction, art galleries, restaurants, professional services, landscaping, childcare and more are profoundly grateful for the support they were given. We also partnered with other Latino organizations throughout the state to support the communities they serve and were able to amplify our efforts through those collaborations.

We are proud of the work that has been done so far, but there is much more to do. We have a waiting list of business that need help to stay open, support employees and their families. The recovery will be a long process and the Latino community needs help more than ever. Many were left behind from most opportunities to access help for a variety of reasons. **It is for these reasons that we respectfully urge you to fund Policy Option Package #111 – Technical Assistance for businesses from underserved communities.** This investment in the largest and yet historically under-resourced minority community in Oregon, will be a decisive and visionary decision towards a better future for all.

Please let me if there are any questions I may answer, or provide you testimony from the clients we have served through this crisis.

Respectfully,

Carmen G. Castro
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