

In Support of HJR 205

February 21, 2022

Chair Smith Warner, Members of the Committee

My name is Jim Houser and I live in Portland, Oregon. I am co-founder of Hawthorne Auto Clinic (ret.) and Co-Chair of the Main Street Alliance of Oregon.

I am here today to speak in support of HJR 205.

Small businesses thrive in places where people can live, work and prosper. For too long, the rules set for our economy have favored big corporations, encouraging extraction from communities instead of investment in them. Nearly half of all small business owners have experienced problems obtaining credit.

The problem is especially dire for people of color and woman-owned businesses. With smart public investment and fair access to capital, small businesses can contribute to economic equity and help communities thrive.

Oregon is a small business state. Over 96% of Oregon businesses (equaling @ 107,00 businesses) have fewer than 50 employees.

The small business sector is the mainstay of local economies and a necessary piece in a more just, democratic future. Yet Covid has revealed our country's profound disinvestment in small businesses, particularly BIPOC-owned businesses, very small businesses, and rural businesses. Though Covid relief programs saved many small businesses, the federal Covid response showed that the U.S. lacks a public infrastructure for fostering a thriving small business economy – much less a small business economy that builds long-denied generational wealth in Black and Brown communities.

The economic recovery will be long and hard. To ensure small businesses recover and thrive we need:

- A Bolder, More Effective Public Infrastructure for Small Business.
- New Public Investment Accessible to Small Business.
- We need to help Small Businesses Access Loans at Lower Interest Rates
- Public banks revitalize local economies and enable more community loans by investing locally, partnering with credit unions and community banks, increasing their access to lower cost funds and enabling them to make more, larger loans for community projects.
- We need an Oregon State bank.

I urge this committee to pass HJR 205.

Thank you. I will be happy to answer any questions.

