



September 11, 2025

The Honorable Nicholas LaLota
Chair
Subcommittee on Contracting and Infrastructure
Committee on Small Business
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Gil Cisneros
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Contracting and Infrastructure
Committee on Small Business
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Regarding: Hearing Titled “Leveling the Playing Field: Fostering Opportunities for Small Business Contractors”

Dear Chairman LaLota and Ranking Member Cisneros:

On behalf of the membership, customers, and strategic partners of the Airport Minority Advisory Council (AMAC), thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for this hearing on fostering opportunities for small business contractors. AMAC is a national non-profit trade association dedicated to advocating and promoting the full participation of minorities and women in employment and contracting opportunities throughout the aviation and airport industries. AMAC’s membership is diverse, including firms certified per U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) regulations as “disadvantaged business enterprises” (DBEs) as well as firms of all sizes involved in airport contracting but which are not certified, large companies, airport executives, managers and airports.

Federal contracting has historically been one of the most effective avenues for building wealth and economic mobility in the United States. However, recent policies have created significant barriers that threaten the survival of small businesses in the federal marketplace.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) was created through the Small Business Act of 1953 to preserve small business institutions and protect free and competitive enterprise. Congress declared that the federal government must actively aid, counsel, assist, and protect small businesses, ensuring they receive a fair share of federal contracts and subcontracts for goods and services.

It was further the intent of Congress to establish a statutory framework for small business participation in federal transportation to ensure that small businesses, including socially and economically disadvantaged individuals, particularly minority- and women-owned businesses, have a meaningful



opportunity to participate in federally funded contracting. Over the decades, Congress has reinforced and expanded these principles, recognizing that without deliberate safeguards, large incumbents would dominate federal contracting and entire communities would remain excluded from the economic benefits of federal spending.

When Congress later established a statutory goal for small and disadvantaged business participation under 49 U.S.C. § 105(f) and the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982, it did so to address historic and systemic barriers that had prevented small businesses from accessing federally funded transportation projects. This was not framed as a preference or quota, but as a corrective mechanism to level the playing field. Congress explicitly recognized that socially and economically disadvantaged firms faced structural barriers to entry, including discrimination, lack of access to capital, and exclusionary industry practices. Without intentional efforts, these firms would continue to be locked out of the vast federal transportation marketplace, leading to decreased competition and diminished innovation.

On February 15, 2024, in this subcommittee’s hearing titled “Leveling the Playing Field: Challenges Facing Small Business Contracting,” Chairman LaLota recognized *“systemic failures in the federal acquisition process, which undermines small business participation in contracting.”* Unfortunately, those historic and systematic barriers identified in 1982, and the *“systematic failures”* identified by the Chairman last year, still exist and still require intentional efforts to expand the supplier base and increase access to the transportation marketplace.

In short, the statutory goal and the creation of the DBE and ACDBE programs were intended to ensure that taxpayer dollars work for all Americans, not just a privileged few. Congress justified these efforts by demonstrating that inclusive participation in federal contracting strengthens the nation’s overall economic health, enhances fairness and integrity in government spending, and safeguards the United States’ position as a global leader in transportation infrastructure development.

In the context of USDOT, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA), and the airport and aerospace industries, the SBA plays a pivotal role by facilitating access for small businesses to compete for contracting opportunities. Through its policies and oversight, the SBA ensures that these businesses are not excluded from federally funded projects, helping to expand participation, foster competition, and strengthen the nation’s economy.

Unfortunately, over the past decade, more than 90,000 small businesses have been lost from the federal contracting base. The number of small businesses receiving federal contracts has decreased by 50 percent over the past 10 years, and nearly 60 percent fewer small businesses are entering the federal contracting system. This decline represents far more than just numbers — it is the erosion of innovation, local job creation, and the diverse entrepreneurial ecosystem that underpins our economy. Small businesses are not just vendors; they are economic anchors in communities, providing good jobs and reinvesting locally. Their absence weakens supply chains, slows innovation, and ultimately drives up costs for taxpayers.

As we struggle to recruit and retain small firms into the Federal supplier base, recent attempts to undermine or eliminate the DBE and ACDBE programs are further exacerbating the decline in participation. The DBE program remains the Federal government’s most effective tool for ensuring that



minority- and women-owned businesses have a fair opportunity to compete for federally assisted highway, transit, and surface transportation projects. Again, the program is not a preference, but a safeguard against the well-documented barriers to entry and participation faced by small and disadvantaged firms in the transportation marketplace.

Preserving the DBE program advances three vital national interests:

Economic Growth – DBEs generate billions of dollars in economic activity each year, creating jobs, expanding the supplier base, and reinvesting in communities that have historically been excluded from federally funded opportunities. When DBEs succeed, they create ripple effects that support local tax bases, enable workforce development, and open pathways for future entrepreneurs. Eliminating or weakening the program would not only harm thousands of existing small businesses but would also shrink competition and reduce the economic vitality of the transportation sector as a whole.

Equity and Fairness – The program ensures taxpayer dollars are spent in a manner that prevents exclusionary practices and sustains public confidence in the integrity of federal contracting. DBE participation ensures that the benefits of massive federal investments are not concentrated among large incumbents, but instead fuel growth across firms that reflect the full diversity, ingenuity and competitiveness of the American economy.

Innovation and Resilience – By broadening participation, DBEs bring new approaches, efficiencies, and community connections that strengthen America’s transportation network. DBE firms often emerge from local communities and are uniquely positioned to offer innovative solutions that larger, entrenched firms may

Unfortunately, deleterious actions by previous and the current Administration are not only continuing but are expediting the reduction in small business participation in government contracting.

Dismantling or diluting the DBE program would be economically shortsighted and socially regressive. It would destroy decades of progress toward inclusion, erase opportunities painstakingly won, and signal to minority- and women-owned businesses that their contributions to the transportation sector are no longer valued. Without the program’s safeguards, existing discriminatory barriers would intensify, reversing gains made since the program’s inception and undermining the credibility of federal transportation policy.

As USDOT and Congress consider priorities for safety, efficiency, and project delivery in the Surface Transportation Act, the DBE program must remain a cornerstone of federal transportation policy. DBEs strengthen the infrastructure ecosystem. Diluting or removing DBE requirements would erode decades of progress toward inclusion and result in a loss of critical capacity, slower delivery, higher costs, and diminished public impact.

Finally, preserving the DBE program is not just about fairness at home; it is about global competitiveness. By cultivating a wider pool of skilled contractors, innovators, and service providers, the United States strengthens its capacity to deliver infrastructure more efficiently and at lower cost than if opportunities were concentrated among a few large incumbents. This meets the original and repeatedly reinforced intent of Congress to preserve free competitive enterprise and ensure that a fair proportion



of federal contracts are awarded to small businesses, not merely as a programmatic goal, but as a deliberate strategy to prevent the concentration of federal procurement in the hands of a few large corporations, which could stifle innovation and create monopolistic markets.

In an era where infrastructure is central to economic competitiveness with Europe, Asia, and emerging markets, the DBE program helps ensure that America's transportation sector remains dynamic, inclusive, and resilient on the world stage. Congress has always recognized small businesses as the backbone of the federal procurement system and a vital safeguard for America's economy, essential to our economic strength and innovation.

By fostering a broad base of suppliers, Congress sought to keep markets competitive and to build a globally competitive U.S. industrial base. Today, as the federal government faces complex global challenges, the role of small businesses in providing unique capabilities and preventing over-reliance on a limited number of prime contractors is more important than ever, reflecting both the original vision of the Act and the ongoing necessity of fair and open competition. By acting now, Congress can preserve competition, strengthen supply chains, and ensure taxpayer dollars are used effectively.

We appreciate the Subcommittee's leadership on this issue and look forward to working together to strengthen our aviation and aerospace sector and to protect and grow our nation's small business industrial base.

Respectfully,

Eboni Wimbush
President & CEO, AMAC