

Testimony of Ms. Jessica Johnson-Cope
President & CEO
Johnson Security Bureau, Inc.

Before the House of Representatives Committee on Small Business

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for your time and for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. I am Jessica Johnson-Cope, President and CEO of Johnson Security Bureau, Inc., located in the Bronx, New York. I am also the Vice President of Cope Brothers & Sons, LLC dba the Soap Box, located in Brooklyn, NY.

Johnson Security Bureau, Inc. (www.johnsonsecuritybureau.com) provides professional security guard and armored car services. Since 1962 three generations of my family have helped to protect people, places, and valuable property across New York City. My grandparents left their homes in the segregated South in search of opportunities. To them, and many others, small business ownership represented freedom: the chance to live the American dream while providing for their family. I am the beneficiary of their vision and hard work.

For the past 10 years I have led Johnson Security. Shortly after I took over the business, due to the untimely passing of my father, I applied to the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program with hopes of keeping Johnson Security's doors open long enough to celebrate our 50th anniversary. Even though I had watched my father and grandmother achieve significant business milestones, I did not feel sufficiently equipped to help Johnson Security reach its full potential. 10,000 Small Businesses provided the tools I needed, in executive business education through a local community college partner (CUNY LaGuardia Community College); networking and peer learning opportunities with other program participants; business advisory services and mentoring; and preparation to obtain financing.

Since completing the program, Johnson Security has created over 150 jobs. Our revenues have increased more than 10-fold. Our operations have expanded into two neighboring states. We have done business with at least seven (7) other program graduates. Additionally, Johnson Security has successfully applied for financing to support our growth. Our team is now preparing for the next phase of innovation and job creation.

Based on Johnson Security's success, and using lessons learned from 10,000 Small Businesses, my husband and I started another company, the Soap Box (www.soapbox.nyc), where we continue his family's entrepreneurial legacy. The Soap Box provides premium laundry services in the Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood where we live. The Soap Box not only allows us to save our clients time, it allows us to employ seven (7) people, and to transform our community, while collaborating with other local businesses. Our work comes with challenges

though as we try to navigate burdensome regulations. Nonetheless we are determined to continue to grow.

The impact of the 10,000 Small Businesses program is evidenced not only in the results I've cited, but also in the outcomes the 2,200+ program alumni who have gathered here in Washington, D.C. this week have experienced, and in the research data that have been presented.

My peers and I face many challenges as we grow our businesses. The current business environment makes it increasingly difficult for small businesses to survive, let alone grow. One challenge is finding capable talent. In addition to leading our family businesses, I serve on the New York State Workforce Investment Board. In this capacity, I hear of many job candidates who lack technical skills that are required as industries advance. I also hear of a number of people entering the workforce who lack key soft skills, such as communication and critical thinking skills.

I know countless small business owners who welcome workforce development investment from the government. By providing small businesses with better information on and access to local Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) initiatives, you can make a significant difference in addressing some of the workforce disadvantages small businesses like ours face compared to larger corporate competitors.

Another challenge is in obtaining the capital firms like ours need, which can be even more difficult for minority and women-owned businesses. Johnson Security received financing that provided working capital to mobilize new projects, cover payroll expenses, and expand our marketing efforts. You can ensure that our nation's small businesses can effectively utilize the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) lending programs that are intended to benefit firms like ours.

Federal contracting is another area where you can remove some barriers to small business success. Johnson Security is a federal contractor that has leveraged federal small business programs as a business development tool. There are several agencies that fall short in meeting the small business contracting goals. You can put stronger accountability measures in place to ensure more contracts are awarded to our nation's qualified small businesses.

In closing, the Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses program has been instrumental in the growth of Johnson Security Bureau, Inc., the Soap Box, and more than 6,700 other program alumni, particularly in job creation, and in access to capital. I encourage you to promote the program to viable firms in your districts. Watch and see what impact those businesses will have on our economy. I also implore you to consider making changes to some of the regulations that are hindering small business growth.

Mr. Chairman, I thank you for your time and attention this morning. I look forward to the work this Committee will continue to do to help make our nation's Small Businesses Big!