

Statement for the Record
Congresswoman Lateefah Simon (CA-12)
House Committee on Small Business
“Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success”
Tuesday February 24, 2026

Thank you, Chair Williams and Ranking Member Velazquez. And thank you to the witnesses for testifying here today.

I agree with much of what my colleagues have said: workforce development and career and technical education matter.

But I also want to take a step back. Because if we're serious about solving the workforce crisis facing small businesses, we must be honest about what's driving it.

The problem isn't all just a skills gap. It's a support gap.

Working Americans, especially working-class Black and brown Americans, people with disabilities, and young people, are being asked to build careers without the foundation they need to stand on.

The full picture includes access to healthcare, housing, fair wages, pensions, and food. Are we making it possible for folks to say yes to opportunities with small businesses?

Expanding apprenticeship programs and career and technical education is certainly critical.

But small businesses are also being squeezed out of the talent pipeline, not because they aren't good employers, but because they cannot compete with the benefits and wages that large corporations can offer.

That's a structural problem, and it demands a structural response.

I want to share something from my own district that I think shows us what the solution can look like.

Last week, I visited the Fruitvale neighborhood in Oakland, and a non-profit called the Unity Council gave me a tour.

The Unity Council has a simple mission: to improve quality of life by building vibrant communities where everyone can work, learn, and thrive.

They do it all: affordable housing, career services, mentorship and job training, Head Start programs, and dedicated support for small and minority-owned businesses.

They don't just aim to support and train workers; they build up the whole community around them.

Youth Uprising and the East Oakland Youth Development Center are also in my district, doing the same - meeting young people where they are at and investing in their futures.

At the federal level, the Treasure Island Job Corps in the Bay Area offers vocational and academic training, but also housing, meals, basic health care, a living allowance, and career transition assistance.

So, it was deeply troubling to me when the Trump Administration tried to kill the Job Corps last year by suspending all operations.

The organizations I mentioned understand something we should take to heart: you cannot separate workforce development from community development.

You cannot train someone for a job and ignore whether they can afford rent, whether they have healthcare, whether they feel safe and seen.

So, let's talk about how to help small businesses compete and grow, but let's not do it with blinders on.

The workers we're talking about today deserve more than a pipeline. They deserve a foundation. And it's our job to help build it.

Thank you, and I yield back.

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