

Hello ladies and gentlemen of the committee. My name is Ashley Bachman, and I am a mother of 3 children and currently own a local restaurant called Cheetah B's. I have been a resident of Grant County for 11 years. When I first moved to Grant County I was working in Lanham, MD for a tradeshow and special events company as a freight coordinator for a company called Hargrove Inc. The pay was far higher than any job I could do in our community but after becoming pregnant with my third child it became impossible for me to travel the way that I was for this job. I saw an opportunity to open my own business when a local restaurant decided to close their doors. We opened Cheetah B's on June 15th of 2015.

I didn't have any culinary training but always had a passion for cooking. It took us a couple of years but we built a highly successful restaurant. Right at the peak of our success Covid shut our business down. My husband and I were both employed through the restaurant so this was terrifying to us. We have 3 children, how were we going to make it? How were we going to pay our bills let alone feed our children. We couldn't except the fact that we were forced to shut down due to Covid 19 regulations, so my husband and I put our thinking caps on. We have a window in our restaurant that faces the road. We decided we would try to operate our restaurant thru what we called our drive thru. Luckily we were able to keep our doors open during this trying time by pivoting our business model by finding different ways to serve our customers.

Unfortunately, after Covid we have been hit with another crisis. The crisis of rising costs of everything. This has proven to be a much tougher task than what we dealt with during the covid regulations.

The cost of goods has been steadily rising throughout the past couple of years. It has been tough to stay ahead of. We have had to change our menu prices countless times just to make sure that we don't go out of business. We still are not charging enough for our menu items because we are afraid that we will price ourselves out of business. We have and continue to struggle with the ever-increasing cost of goods. Of course, our customers suffer with us as they pay more for menu items that have gone up in price, the customers that still come out to eat that is. We have taken a hit in business so far, these past two quarters, having less customers coming in.

Just as the increasing cost of goods have required us to change menu prices and menus all together, the failures in the supply chain have caused the same. I can't tell you how many times our food reps have come into our establishment to warn us of which products were going to be out of stock for an unknown amount of time or which products were going to be

increasing in cost to the point that we may not even want to order them. Just one example would be bone in chicken wings. We used to sell 1-2 40lb cases a week. They used to be \$40 a case before they skyrocketed up to over \$150 for the same amount. Luckily, this is one of the very few items that has finally come back down to earth.

Just as the cost of goods have gone up so has the cost of our energy to cook those items. Our kitchen cooking equipment runs off propane. This is the only utility that we pay in our establishment as our Leaser pays the others. During some months, the cost of propane has more than doubled the price that it was in the corresponding months of 2020. The rise in price in all other energy costs has caused our lease payment to be increased from \$2000 to \$4500 a month in only 5 years time. Our little restaurant has been bleeding money due to all the increased costs and I don't know how much longer we'll be able to continue with the prices the way they are. It's very worrisome.

Our business has been very fortunate with workers during the past few years. We also pay a higher wage to keep these employees. We have however seen how it has affected other businesses. We've heard through our food reps of other restaurants that have had to close or completely change their business hours because of a lack of workers. Just last week I saw at my doctors office that CVS pharmacy is no longer open on the weekends because of staff shortages. I believe that the amount of money that has been handed out throughout the years has definitely contributed to this. Around the same time that stimulus checks were going out and the added unemployment benefit money is when the worker shortage started to happen.

Higher fuel costs effect our community probably more than most. It takes more fuel to get our groceries and other essential items across the mountains that we live in between. Our local grocery store charges sometimes double to even triple on goods than other grocery stores in more populated areas. Our local gas stations charge around 30 cents per gallon more than gas stations only 30 miles away.

Some of the biggest financial worries I hear from my community is the cost of goods, price on gas, price of utilities and just life in general. The cost of everything has gone up. I see lots of my old customers out at the grocery store and they will tell me they are sorry they haven't eaten at my restaurant lately because they are just struggling to live.

My community is having a hard time right now. I have colleagues and powerful community members asking me for a second job and unfortunately with the rise of inflation costs I cannot run with anymore staff members at the moment. Lots of my current staff members are using their employment at my restaurant as a second source of income and still find themselves struggling. My husband and I have even found ourselves struggling to keep up and are also taking on other business opportunities besides our restaurant.

We have such a wonderful community that is trying their best to bring in new businesses to provide more job opportunities and fun things to do for our youth to the area, but entrepreneurs just like myself are scared to make any major financial decisions during this recession. We personally bought a 5000 square foot building to be the future site of Cheetah B's and Potomac Valley Brewery but have put our project to a halt seeing other peers go thru devastating financial hardships working on similar projects. We can only hope that things will normalize again and give our businesses and children hope for the future. It was a pleasure speaking with you all today and thank you for having me.