

Four Generations of the American Dream

Written Testimony of Adrian Adornetto

Before the House Committee on Small Business

July 1, 2026

Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velázquez, and distinguished Members of the House Committee on Small Business:

Good morning. Thank you for inviting me to testify before you today. It is both a privilege and a tremendous honor to appear before this Committee to share my family's story and what entrepreneurship has meant to generations of Americans like mine.

I am also grateful to have my wife, Erika, with me today, along with our children—Enzo, Giada, Gabriella, and Jase. They are the reason this work matters, because everything my family has built has always been about creating opportunity for the next generation.

My name is Adrian Adornetto. First and foremost, I am a husband and a father. I am a proud American by birth, Sicilian by heritage, an entrepreneur by calling, and a product of the American Dream.

To understand why I am here today, you first have to understand where my story began.

My grandparents, Philip and Catherine Adornetto, came to this country from Sicily with hope, determination, faith, and an unwavering belief in the American Dream. My grandmother was only nine years old and my grandfather was just sixteen when they left everything they knew in search of opportunity in America.

They settled in Zanesville, Ohio, where they raised three sons: Anthony, Alfred, and my father, James “Jim” Adornetto. My Uncle Anthony became a doctor of optometry. My Uncle Alfred built a successful career in corporate leadership. My father chose entrepreneurship.

With the encouragement and sacrifice of his parents, my father opened Adornetto's Pizzeria in 1958 when he was just nineteen years old. He later opened The Old Market House Inn in 1974 and Giacomo's in 1994.

I was born in 1977 and grew up during the 1980s. My parents divorced when I was young, but they both made sure I always had a close relationship with each of them. I spent much of my week with my mother and weekends with my father in the restaurants.

My first boardroom was not in a corporate office. It was every Sunday morning after church, around the breakfast table, where my grandparents, father, aunts, uncles, and relatives discussed the previous week's business—what worked, what did not, and how to improve. Looking back, that was my first board meeting.

When I was thirteen, my grandmother trained me at the host stand. She watched everything. If my hands were in my pockets, if I failed to greet guests warmly, or if I forgot to thank them for coming, I knew I would hear about it. Then she challenged me to learn every guest's name. She was not just teaching hospitality. She was teaching respect.

My grandmother often reminded me, "To be book smart is great. To be street smart is great. To be both is where I want you to be." Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island gave me knowledge. My family business taught me wisdom.

Growing up, I dreamed of becoming an actor. My family never pressured me into the restaurant business. They encouraged me to pursue whatever would make me happy. But over time, the restaurant business found me.

I fell in love with the energy, the teamwork, the busy nights, the waiting lists, and the opportunity to create memorable experiences for guests.

In 2013, my father and I completed the transition of the family businesses. I purchased the operating businesses while he retained the real estate. We did not want it to be an inheritance. We wanted it to be a transition. We were father and son first, business partners second.

My father continued working alongside me until Alzheimer's disease gradually changed our lives. He passed away peacefully in February 2024. I miss him every day, but I carry with me the lessons he taught about leadership, humility, and treating people with dignity.

Those lessons also shaped the way I viewed leadership beyond my own restaurants. Small business owners have a responsibility not only to their own companies, but also to their employees, their communities, and the industries that help support local economies. I saw that firsthand through my service as Chairman of the Ohio Restaurant & Hospitality Alliance, where I had the opportunity to work with and advocate for restaurant and hospitality businesses across our state.

That experience reinforced something I had already learned in my own family business: small business leadership matters. It matters in the way we train young workers, support local suppliers, create gathering places, respond during hard times, and speak up for policies that allow entrepreneurs to grow, reinvest, and serve their communities.

As I reflect on my family's journey, I realize something important. My grandparents came to this country from Sicily with hope, determination, faith, and a belief in the American Dream. Their children became proud Italian Americans. My generation grew up simply as Americans. America is the only home I have ever known, yet I remain deeply proud of the Sicilian heritage, values, faith, love of family, resilience, and work ethic my grandparents passed down to us.

Looking at my wife and our children sitting behind me today, I cannot help but think about my grandparents. They could never have imagined that one day their grandson would have the privilege of appearing before the United States Congress to tell their story.

My grandparents sought the American Dream. My father spent his life building it. I have been blessed with the opportunity to continue it. Now my greatest responsibility is to preserve it for my children and, I hope someday, for my grandchildren.

But preserving that dream requires more than family pride. It requires a business environment where small businesses can survive, reinvest, hire, and pass opportunity on to the next generation.

Running a restaurant has never been easy. Over the years, we have faced recessions, supply disruptions, inflation, labor challenges, and rising operating costs. Each one has been a gut check. But nothing compared to COVID, which nearly shut us down permanently. We survived because of our employees, our community, and our ability to adapt. In the 1970s, my father had the foresight to add a drive-thru to our business. Decades later, that decision became a lifeline during a global pandemic.

I have spoken a lot about my immediate family, but there is also my employee family. My family's businesses would not be where they are today without the thousands of Ohioans who have worked with us over the past six decades. Many started in entry-level jobs as teenagers, saw the opportunity this industry offered, and worked their way into positions of greater responsibility. Some have stayed for decades and now serve in leadership roles.

I think of **NAME**, a longtime employee who began working with our family 51 years ago while also teaching in our community. He is now retired from education, but he still works with us and helps manage one of our newly renovated locations. Stories like **NAME'S** remind me that restaurants are not just places to eat. They are places where people build careers, relationships, and lives.

I am grateful to Members of Congress who recognize that small businesses are still carrying burdens from the pandemic, inflation, and rising costs. Tax provisions such as accelerated depreciation make a real difference. They allowed me to reinvest in my

business, complete overdue improvements, renovate locations, and hire local Ohio contractors to do the work.

Family businesses do not simply pass down recipes. They pass down values, responsibility, work ethic, integrity, and the belief that every generation should leave something better than it found.

Restaurants and small businesses like mine are part of the American fabric. For nearly 250 years, entrepreneurs have helped define who we are: independent, hardworking, community-minded, and hopeful about the future. To our patrons, we are gathering places for first dates, anniversaries, birthdays, sports celebrations, and family milestones. To our communities, we are employers, training grounds, taxpayers, and anchors of local economies.

Thank you for allowing me to share my family's story. It is, in many ways, the story of America. May God bless our small businesses, the families who build them, and the United States of America.