

**Veronica Cool, President & CEO, Cool & Associates LLC**  
**Written Testimony for U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Small Business**  
***250 Years of American Legacy: Small Businesses and the American Dream***  
**July 1, 2026**

Esteemed Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Velázquez, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me to testify today. It is a privilege to appear before you as our nation prepares to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the United States.

My name is Veronica Cool, and I am the founder, President and CEO of Cool & Associates, LLC a Maryland-based small business that I started in 2011. Today, our firm partners with government agencies, healthcare systems, educational institutions, nonprofits, and private-sector organizations across the country, helping them communicate more effectively, engage diverse communities, develop strategic solutions, and strengthen organizational performance.

While I am proud of the company we have built, I am even more grateful for what made it possible. Like millions of entrepreneurs before me, I was given an opportunity. That opportunity became the American Dream.

Today I hope to share not only my own journey, but also what I have learned after fifteen years of building a business through economic uncertainty, technological disruption, changing administrations, and constant reinvention.

**My Journey to Entrepreneurship**

I was born in the Dominican Republic and immigrated to the United States believing something that countless newcomers before me have believed- that if I worked hard, continued learning, treated people with integrity, and remained resilient, I could build a better future.

That belief shaped every decision I have made.

Long before I started my company, I spent years as a banker, working with healthcare organizations, government agencies, nonprofits, and businesses. Again, I noticed the same challenge. Organizations genuinely wanted to serve increasingly diverse communities, but many struggled to communicate effectively and earn trust. Most people assumed the problem was language. I learned the real issue was much deeper.

Communication is about understanding people: their culture, experiences, concerns, and aspirations. Translation is simply one tool. Building trust is the real goal. That realization became the foundation of my business.

When I launched Cool years ago, I did not have investors or venture capital. I did not inherit a family business. Like so many entrepreneurs, I started with experience, determination, relationships, and an idea I believed could make organizations- and honestly, our communities, stronger.

Looking back, I realized I wasn't simply starting a company. I was expanding on a career centered on creating opportunity and building legacy.

### **The American Dream Is Still Being Written**

My story is not that different. Across Maryland, thousands of immigrant entrepreneurs are contributing to our economy every day. According to the Maryland Comptroller's report *Immigration and the Economy*, immigrants comprise approximately 17 percent of Maryland's population and 21 percent of its labor force. The report further concludes that international migration has become the primary driver of Maryland's recent population growth, helping sustain our workforce, our tax base, and our economy.<sup>1</sup>

Those numbers are meaningful to me because I see them reflected in everyday real people, not just statistics.

I see small business owners opening restaurants, construction companies, accounting firms, technology startups, childcare centers, and consulting firms. I see employers creating jobs and investing back in their communities. I see families providing stable homes one paycheck at a time.

Entrepreneurship has always been one of America's greatest engines of economic mobility, and immigrants continue to play an important role in that story. As an immigrant business owner myself, I have had the privilege of experiencing that promise firsthand.

### **Reinvention Is the Small Business Superpower**

Entrepreneurship is often celebrated through stories of success. What gets far less attention is the constant reinvention required to survive. When I first launched my business, we primarily focused on language access, i.e., simple translations. Today, we provide strategic planning, organizational assessments, facilitation, workforce development, research, stakeholder engagement, communications strategy, leadership development, and guidance on the responsible implementation of artificial intelligence. Meaning, the day-to-day operations of engaging and communicating.

That evolution reflects what I believe is one of the defining characteristics of American small businesses. We adapt. Every major challenge over the last fifteen years has required us to rethink how we serve clients. We adapted during the tech bubble, through COVID-19, and as inflation increased operating costs. And we had to adapt when clients' priorities shifted.

Today, we continue to adapt as AI transforms the way professional services are delivered. Small businesses have never been static. Our superpower has always been our ability to adapt and evolve.

### **Behind Every Small Business Is a Personal Story**

People often ask what it takes to build a successful business. The honest answer is fairy dust... actually, it's resilience and persistence, and of course, a large dose of humor.

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<sup>1</sup> COMPTROLLER OF MARYLAND, STATE OF THE ECONOMY SERIES: IMMIGRATION AND THE ECONOMY APRIL 2024

There were years when I wore every hat imaginable: Boss lady, project manager, salesperson, recruiter, HR, finance, customer service and sometimes even information technology support.

There were years when I didn't even pay myself to ensure my team was covered. There were contracts we celebrated winning and others that taught painful lessons.

One of my earliest opportunities as a business owner was a small subcontract. Financially, it was not significant, and I remember wondering whether it was even worth pursuing. The paperwork and compliance requirements were intimidating, and the administrative burden did not seem commensurate with the size of the project. Like many first-time government contractors, I questioned whether a small business like mine could realistically compete in that environment. But of course, I stayed with it!

That modest subcontract became the foundation upon which we built our company. Each successful project led to another opportunity, each client became a reference, and each challenge improved our processes.

Recently, I experienced one of those full-circle moments. Our team was participating in a highly competitive procurement. During the scheduling of oral presentations, I learned that the prime contractor and every member of the bidding team had adjusted their schedules to accommodate ours. We were later told that because Cool was part of the proposal team, the agency had elevated the proposal for review. Not because we were the largest, nor because of the allocated marketing budget. But rather because our reputation preceded us.

Over fifteen years, we have earned the trust of our clients through consistent quality, culturally responsive communications, authentic community engagement, and an unwavering commitment to delivering results. Our work had become synonymous with helping organizations build trust with the communities they serve.

I have been fortunate to receive awards and recognition throughout my career, from respected business organizations, professional associations, even the Baltimore Ravens and international institutions. I am deeply grateful for each of those honors. But that moment meant something different. It was not recognition for me personally. It was validation that our work has become a trusted catalyst for meaningful change.

When organizations communicate more effectively, people participate. When people participate, programs perform better. When programs perform better, communities become healthier, workforces become stronger, businesses grow, and economic opportunity expands. That growth creates jobs, strengthens local economies, and ultimately contributes to a stronger tax base and a more prosperous nation.

Knowing that our firm's involvement signaled confidence, again, not because of who we knew, but because of the impact we consistently deliver- is one of the greatest honors of my career.

To me, that is what building a legacy looks like. It is not measured by awards on a wall or contracts won. It is measured by earning the trust to help shape outcomes that improve lives, strengthen communities, and create opportunities that extend far beyond your own business.

During COVID, we landed the emergency translation contract for the State of Maryland... we delivered properly translated and culturally appropriate content, at the relevant reading level in less than 1-2 hours. Our small but mighty team coordinated three shifts, in essence around-the-clock support for the State to ensure every essential worker-janitor, cleaner, grocery store clerk & stocker- had the needed information to keep themselves and their family safe. As a team, we gave up sleep and took on a monumental task – proudly and eagerly, because informing our community was THE priority. I am inordinately proud that my team is willing and nimble to adapt and ALWAYS deliver, but that came at a steep cost- morale, exhaustion, increased costs, and delayed payments.

Those experiences are shared by entrepreneurs in every community across America.

### **Communication Is Economic Infrastructure**

Over the years, I have come to believe something that may not immediately sound like economic policy. Communication is economic infrastructure. Being a proud Baltimorean, I know infrastructure brings to mind highways, airports, broadband, and obviously ports. All very important investments. But so does ensuring people understand how to participate in our economy.

When patients cannot understand discharge instructions, health outcomes suffer.  
When entrepreneurs cannot navigate government procurement processes, revenue is lost.  
When communities do not trust institutions, participation declines. When small business owners cannot access federal resources because they are difficult to find or understand, growth slows or dissipates.

Effective communication builds trust. Trust builds participation. Participation strengthens our economy. It is a simple principle that has guided every client engagement our company has undertaken.

### **Small Businesses Strengthen America**

Small businesses represent 99.9 percent of all businesses in the United States, employ nearly half of the nation's private-sector workforce, and generate approximately 44% of our country's economic activity.<sup>2</sup>

Those numbers are extraordinary. But behind every statistic is a family. An employee. An entrepreneur. And a dream fueled by resilience and persistence. Every pay period, millions of business owners across America carry the responsibility of making payroll. Every contract supports another household (or several!!). Every new hire creates another opportunity.

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Small Business Administration, Office of Advocacy, *Frequently Asked Questions About Small Business 2024*

These realities rarely make headlines, but they define the everyday work of small businesses across this great nation.

### **Looking Ahead**

As Congress considers the next 250 years of American entrepreneurship, I respectfully offer several recommendations.

- First, create greater predictability in the business environment. Small businesses can adapt to anything, but uncertainty, especially increasing costs associated to housing, gas and housing, makes planning and investment significantly more difficult.
- Second, continue simplifying government contracting and reducing unnecessary administrative burdens. Small businesses should spend more time serving customers than navigating paperwork. Nor incurring excessive expenses affiliated with hiring lawyers and accountants to interpret all the laws and regulations.
- Third, invest in entrepreneurship education, technical assistance, and workforce development. Programs that help entrepreneurs build financial, operational, and technological capacity strengthen our economy for the long term.
- Fourth, help small businesses responsibly adopt emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence. AI should expand opportunity, improve productivity, and allow business owners to remain competitive while preserving the human relationships that successful businesses are built upon.
- Finally, continue recognizing that America's entrepreneurial strength comes from its diversity, not simply demographic diversity, but diversity of industries, ideas, experiences, and perspectives. Throughout my career, I have had the privilege of serving organizations led by Republicans, Democrats, independents, nonprofits- including Fortune 500 companies, hospitals, universities, and local governments. Regardless of politics, they all shared the same goal: serving people more effectively. Small businesses do their best work when we focus on solving problems, creating opportunity, and strengthening our communities.

As I prepared these remarks, I thought about the little girl who arrived in this country believing that hard work could change the course of her life. I thought about the first client who trusted a brand-new company. I thought about every team member who has helped build Cool into what it is today.

I thought about the clients who challenged us to innovate, the communities that welcomed us, and the countless entrepreneurs across the United States who wake up every morning carrying the responsibility of creating opportunity- not solely for themselves, but for others.

The American Dream has never promised certainty. Entrepreneurship certainly does not. What it offers is something even more valuable: the freedom to build, to contribute, to innovate, and to leave something better than we found it.

That promise changed my life.

My hope is that 250 years after our nation's founding, we continue building an America where the next entrepreneur, regardless of where they were born, what language they speak, or how much money they start with, can still believe that through hard work, resilience, and opportunity, that dream remains within reach.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.



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