



## Written Testimony

When people think of social media, they often picture a feed of birthday photos, vacation selfies, or the occasional “no excuses” gym post. But beneath the surface is an entire web and ecosystem of commerce. Social media is a marketplace, a workplace, and in many cases, a lifeline for small and large businesses alike.

In the United States, the social media industry has grown into a multi-hundred-billion-dollar sector, touching everything from advertising and publishing to retail and entertainment. But its impact is perhaps most deeply felt by small businesses. For a restaurant owner, a craftsman, or a young college athlete building her brand, social media isn’t just marketing — it’s survival and scale.

For influencers, whether they have a few hundred followers or millions, revenue streams are diverse: brand partnerships, affiliate revenue, platform payments, merchandise, and even their own product lines.

And every influencer fuels an ecosystem of offshoot businesses: attorneys, assistants, editors, publishing houses, and managers like myself. Some even play strategic roles in fundraising and acquisitions for emerging startups.

Consider Azuna, a Buffalo-based brand whose digital strategy helped it scale to 25 employees, a Buffalo Bills sponsorship, four agencies, and has contracted over one hundred influencers some of which sit on their cap table. Or Chef Darian Bryan, an immigrant entrepreneur with multiple restaurants and a recent Snickers campaign at Highmark Stadium creating food so delicious it would make you want to break a table. These are local economic engines powered by digital reach.

And the beauty of social media is its accessibility. I helped scale CelebExperts and Renegade Talent MGMT while living outside Fort Bragg, North Carolina, as a proud military spouse. Unlike many in my community who face staggering unemployment rates, I was fortunate to continue my career remotely. Social media allows people to earn a living, contribute to their families, and bring economic opportunity to their hometowns and in various locations, whether that’s Buffalo, Fayetteville, Endicott, NY or beyond.

Most recently, our organization has begun work in the NIL space. Specifically, young dynamic women who are learning to build long-lasting businesses around passions they love. This next generation represents not just a cultural shift, but a chance to democratize entrepreneurship itself.

But as powerful as this industry is, it faces real challenges. Today, I want to highlight three.

First, cash flow. Too often, influencer partnerships are paid months after services are delivered. For many creators and small businesses, waiting that long is not just difficult, it's unsustainable.

Second, the rise of AI. We are entering a world where it is increasingly difficult to know what is real or fake. Bot influencers, Content theft, dubbing, and misrepresentation don't just hurt credibility but can have dangerous consequences.

Third, the resource gap. Many new entrepreneurs lack the knowledge to navigate contracts and offers. Education and transparency in this space are critical. This isn't about the creator I manage, it is about the creators I don't.

Social media is no longer just about pictures and posts. It's about people, jobs, and communities. It deserves thoughtful consideration, protection, and support as we navigate its future together.

Thank You.