

FINAL TESTIMONY

Gia Giasullo

Owner, Brooklyn Farmacy & Soda Fountain / 513 Henry Street, Brooklyn NY 11231

Hello, I am Gia Giasullo, and I am the co-owner, along with my brother Peter Freeman, of the Brooklyn Farmacy & Soda Fountain.

Thank you to the committee and to Nydia Velaquez for inviting me to participate in this testimony. It is my honor to be here. It is my honor to speak on behalf of small businesses.

There are a million faces of small business, and I am just one. I am here to give a face to one small business.

I am also here in solidarity with other small business across america, who, like me are committed to making my street, my state, and my country a better place to live.

I am also here to express my gratitude to the NYBDC who invested in us, and who continue to support our small business. We received a 504 loan through the SBDC, and we were graciously awarded the Small Business Family Business of the Year. The NYBDC has offered us invaluable support and I can tell you that I would not be here speaking to you today without their commitment to our small business.

Finally, and most importantly, I am here today because I strongly believe that small business provide a priceless contribution towards the overall wealth and health of a community, and therefore we deserve your special attention and support. We, like you, serve our community. Visit us. Talk to us.

The Brooklyn Farmacy is located on the corner of Henry and Sackett streets in Carroll Gardens, Brooklyn. Housed in a historic apothecary, the original interior boasts a 100 year old penny tile floor, wooden drawers and a tin ceiling. There are nine red twirling bar stools, and a Bastian Blessing soda fountain made in Chicago. We opened in the summer of 2010, and we are a full

service soda fountain with a staff of fifteen. We are best known for our creative ice cream sundaes with names like the Affugazi Affogato and the Sundae of Broken Dreams made with vanilla ice cream, warm caramel, broken pretzel rods and fresh whipped cream.

In the late 1940s before drive-throughs and bottled sodas, the number of soda fountains in America reached 125 thousand at its height. Practically a fountain on every main street USA. Today the Brooklyn Pharmacy is one of a handful of full service soda fountains in America, but we proudly serve the same purpose: as a gathering spot for young and old alike. The soda fountain is everybody's place. We are a slam dunk for visiting grandparents, and we have several regulars that are just hitting the ripe age of four. We have book groups that meet up regularly, and friends that meet weekly. It's been nine years since we opened our doors in 2010, and since then we have watched gapped tooth kids turn into college bound kids. Several of them, we've hired. We've hosted birthdays, anniversaries, and showers. We've made hundreds of egg creams at local fundraisers. We've hosted senators and assembly members for civic talk, and even a wedding was officiated at our fountain. For sure the pink bench outside has seen more than one bent knee proposal. We donate year round to schools, and class visits are regular thing. We have been featured on numerous cooking shows, and media outlets. We are visited by tour groups from all over the world, and we offer free egg creams at the fountain on election days, noted most recently in an editorial in the New York Times on how business can encourage citizens to vote.

Though we are a tourist attraction, we know our regulars and we are committed to our neighborhood. With weekly events like a tot sing-a-longs, a knitting group, and civics night, we have the opportunity to be a part of our community and in the end, serve them more than something to eat. We have rotary phones, typewriters, and adding machines, in fact our collection is getting out of hand. We have comic books, piles of them, that we gently place on the table if the cell phones come out. We have candles and songs for birthdays. We make treats before your eyes and sometimes we invent things on the spot, because "hey kid, that's a good idea!"

We source locally, and pride ourselves on working with vendors some of whom, deliver items on

their bike. Our staff is offered flexible schedules, and many have worked with us for years as we employ them through schooling, travel, sports and performance schedules. We strive to foster community amongst our staff, and we value their voices. We know that we are not the last train stop for them, so to speak, but we encourage them to embrace the philosophy of “How you do anything is how you do everything”. We value hard work, and by example, teach them. For many, we are a first job, after school and weekends. We also value the transitional time for youth gaining independence, and we provide a safe place in a big city for those that are away from home from the first time.

This isn't to say that it isn't a hard game to play. As business owners, we often wear all the hats. If you gave us an eighth day of the week, we'd probably work it. The costs associated with doing business can be almost prohibitive, — from insurances to payroll taxes to credit cards swipe fees, all before we've even bought a tub of ice cream! A big company has the resources to hire for all positions, yet a small business person often needs to juggle many positions at once. Look at me, this one face of a small business owner. Me. A designer, marketer, copywriter, photographer, event planner, social media producer, window designer, chef, waitress, soda jerk, and on some occasions, a dish washer who trains, schedules, hires and fires.

As I said at the start, I believe that small business provide immeasurable value to neighborhoods and communities. In our case, memories created before our eyes. First birthdays, first egg creams, first jobs. We are the spot tourists plan to visit, or find by luck. We are the spot you bring your visiting sister. We are the spot you come alone, to sit at the counter and read the paper. We are a real place. We are that place.

We value our customers, and by extension, we value our community.

We are not just the corner store soda fountain, a business without a face.

I am my customer's neighbors, and I am the face of a small business in America.

Thank you for your time today, and for inviting me to speak on behalf of Brooklyn Farmacy & Soda Fountain.

