

Brittney Reese of FIT & NU (Aurora, CO)
Testimony for Congressional Hearing titled, “Honoring National Small Business Heros”
May 8, 2019

Chairwomen Velazquez, Ranking Member Chabot, and Members of the Small Business Committee:

Thank you for hosting this hearing to honor small business heroes and for inviting me to speak today. I also want to thank my representative, Congressman Jason Crow, for giving FIT & NU the opportunity to speak here about the work we are doing as a small business in the district he represents.

My name is Brittney Rae Reese, Co-Founder of [FIT & NU](#) - Colorado's first FITness & NUtrition club for busy women of color located in Colorado's 6th Congressional District in the city of Aurora. My sister, Joslyn, and I started FIT & NU in 2015 with the mission to help busy women of color improve their health, ease their minds and influence their communities and families to **LIVE WELL**. We do this through Functional FITness training and habit-based NUtrition coaching. When asked, why we were selected as a Small Business Hero, we were told because we “take advantage of our resources, work hard, and bring passion”. My sister and I work well together and maintain a family relationship that extends to the women we serve.

There's Tammy: a mother of 3 who has been buried under unhealthy weight for years and is determined to break free. She has shared her appreciation for us “birthing the vision to transform the lives of busy women of color”. She states, “we so often put everyone above ourselves - husband, kids, careers, etc. So to have a place where women who look like me are winning with weight loss and creating healthy habits, just to name a few, is nourishment to my soul”.

Client, Franita Ware, Ph.D - educator, consultant and creator of Radical Self Care shared that for the past nine years she had been searching for a place that is big enough and yet small enough to meet her needs. She stated, “I am grateful to have found a place where I can be myself, feel welcome and included. I have not had this experience anywhere else, and I love that it's women of color supporting women of color. I truly feel like I'm fulfilling a purpose that not only serves me but serves a great (small) business.”

FIT & NU celebrated its official grand opening as a fully staffed and equipped boutique wellness club in March of 2019, not only positively impacting health and wellness for women in the community we grew up in, but employing, collaborating and contracting with other small businesses and entrepreneurs as well. Hard work and determination alone did not get us here. The success that my sister and I have enjoyed so far is due largely to the support of local non profits like the [Women's Business Center at Mi Casa Resource Center](#) and [Community Enterprise Development Services](#) (also known as “CEDS Finance”) - two Colorado

organizations that equip women and minority business owners in our pursuit of impact, longevity and profitability.

I highlight these organizations because of the work they do to propel low income entrepreneurs like myself through glass ceilings, out of cycles of poverty, and beyond gender wage gaps. Between 2014 and 2018, Mi Casa created 721 jobs, launched 35 new businesses and hosted countless workshops on topics ranging from finance and HR to strategic planning and social media marketing. CEDS has financed 213 businesses and placed a total of \$4.05 million in investments with the help of the Small Business Administration.

So when I think of what Congress can do to help small businesses, it would be to continue programs in the Small Business Administration that fund organizations like Mi Casa and CEDS that support disadvantaged businesses, such as minority-owned and women-owned businesses. This will afford us to grow beyond the uphill battle as start-ups, and give us the resources to hire team members, implement marketing campaigns beyond grass root efforts, and to become more sound business operators and owners. Also, as Congress passes legislation that allocates capital funding in support of small businesses, the focus should be on helping businesses develop and sustain internal operations. As low income business owners, we are our main human resource. We would like to help ourselves and other disinvested people and communities join the economic mainstream. Wage subsidy programs and debt relief are amongst those of interest to us.

Congress should also be giving funding and incentivizing small businesses to partner and collaborate with their community members to help expand their reach.

We sought out community health organizations that share the same mission and we proposed a partnership to help both bottom lines. The Colorado Black Health Collaborative, The Stapleton Foundation - Be Well Initiative, American Diabetes Association and soon the Black Women's Health Imperative are a few of the organizations that have helped expand our reach. Because of these partnerships our network, our visibility and trust within our community has grown.

Furthermore, if Women's Business Centers (WBC) and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) did not exist, we, the disadvantaged black women visionaries, low-income entrepreneurs, change-agents of global health, refugees and minorities would not have access to low cost developmental services and capital to grow.

In closing, we are thankful for the contributions Congress has made, thus far, to bridge the social and economic gap for women like me; however, many of the available resources are still directed at larger companies, yet businesses that are "small" to the federal government need these partnerships with organizations that see them as large. I hope my testimony affirms that women and minority-focused organizations *do* make a difference and that they are the lifeline to making the "American Dream" work.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our story on behalf of all women-owned and minority-owned small businesses in the district and the country.