



**Testimony of Joshua Henry
President, GO Lab, Inc.
Before the House Committee on Small Business
Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural and Rural Business Development**

Prioritizing Small Underserved and Rural Businesses in the SBIR/STTR Programs
June 23, 2021

Chairman Golden, Ranking Member Hagedorn and members of the Subcommittee on Underserved, Agricultural and Rural Business Development.

Good afternoon.

My name is Dr. Joshua Henry. I'm president of GO Lab, a Maine-based building materials company.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to talk to you today about the Small Business Innovation Research Program, the vital support it gave our company at its inception and some of the ways we believe SBIR can be strengthened.

Next year, at our production facility inside a former paper mill, GO Lab will become the first company to manufacture wood fiber insulation made in America.

Our products, marketed under the brand name TimberHP, will include batt insulation for stud wall cavities, continuous exterior insulation boards and a blown-in loose fill—designed to work as one comprehensive, above-grade system for the entire building envelope or as affordable, healthier, drop-in replacements for foam, mineral wool, cellulose and other traditional insulations targeting the residential and commercial construction market.

While SBIR grants are modest, monetarily speaking, they are nonetheless critically important to early stage companies. The program gives small businesses and entrepreneurs the freedom to research and develop new technologies, often in partnership with local universities, that are years away from commercialization.



When we founded GO Lab, in 2017, insulation made from softwood chips had already been a successful product in the European market for more than 20 years. Our SBIR grant allowed us to partner with researchers at the University of Maine's Advanced Structures and Composites Center. Using the center's advanced machinery and equipment, we were able to determine that we could make a more renewable, cost competitive and higher performing form of wood fiber insulation in America—by using alternative binding agents in the insulation manufacturing process.

Too often, these sorts of research and design partnerships with major universities, and access to their highly specialized equipment, are more easily accessible in urban centers than in remote, rural communities like the one where GO Lab's production facility is based.

Our SBIR grant, though small, helped validate the entire concept at the heart of our business plan. We were then able to use this hard, verified data to begin the long process of raising private equity and other financing to move our vision of wood fiber insulation, made in America, toward reality.

Expanding funding and partnership opportunities under the SBIR program is critical, if we hope to empower the kind of entrepreneurship in rural communities that make it easier for new industries to take hold, hire local people and thrive.

I'd like to end my remarks with two suggestions for improving SBIR.

The program, as valuable as it is, could be made even stronger by simplifying the application process. As a former college professor with a PhD in Materials Chemistry, I've applied for many grants over the years. Nonetheless, a colleague, also an experienced grant writer, and I found the application process far more bureaucratic and complicated than it needed to be. To complete our proposal, we ended up needing



extensive help from consultants and SBIR specialists, hired by the state of Maine. It still took many weeks to complete.

Simplifying the application process would be an important step in the right direction.

Additionally, as a business launching in a community qualifying for the New Markets Tax Credit program— and designated as a federal Opportunity Zone—I strongly believe, as I noted earlier, that more incentives are needed to ensure that a program as valuable as SBIR is able to make more investments in under-resourced, rural areas, where public research and development resources are limited.

Thank you for your time and I'd be happy to answer the committee's questions.