

Testimony before Senate Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs

Wednesday, June 3rd at 10:00 .m.

Sen. [Michael Sirotkin](#), Chair, Sen. [Alison Clarkson](#), Vice Chair, Sen. [Becca Balintm](#)
Sen. [Randy Brockm](#) Sen. [Cheryl Hooker](#), Clerk

Senator Sirotkin and members of the Senate Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs Committee,

I am very appreciative of your time and for the way that you listen to what is happening in our communities. Today we focus on what is happening as a result of the work in areas of housing and Micro-Business Development during this time of the covid-19 pandemic.

CVOEO and all the other CAPs are working with individuals and families experiencing homelessness who are in hotels due to the present pandemic. CVOEO is working at the Holiday Inn in collaboration with the Agency of Human Services. We provide 24/7 presence to assist with safety for the community and for individuals who are homeless and to expedite the process for them to move into permanent housing. I was present during the 4 days that we welcomed over 100 guests to the facility. And that number is rising. It is not what you would expect. Yes, there were those struggling with alcohol and substances, those prone to violent resolution of problems. Yes, there were guests with severe mental health challenges and issues. And that is one of the reasons we are there 24/7 to work with these individuals to get the services they need. And there were many more individuals coming in wheelchairs, and with walkers and with care givers because of amputations. There are Veterans, and the gentle elderly and the confused. They are receiving 3 good meals a day and attention. They are being rescued from diabetic seizures, we are working with restorative justice and CVOEO has Housing Advocates on site to help them with assessments for Coordinated Entry and to get on housing wait lists. We are there to help get them the documentation they need to go forward. This is actually a rare opportunity to reach many people at the same time. We intent to take the best advantage of that opportunity.

The other population we are working with are those Microbusiness clients who are working harder than ever during this pandemic. They are attending more webinars and preparing themselves for a better opportunity in the future. We have seen a 30 % increase in attendance. We have seen clients who worked with us years ago reach back out for support, as we are their trusted business counselors. We know that our clients have the capacity to be successful. From 2010 to 2017, we helped open or expand 197 businesses – and 74 are *known* to have remained open for at least three years. Many more *are* still open, but do not have active websites. In fact, 11 of the businesses that opened or expanded in 2010 are still open today – and this is just from CVOEO. Our former clients are reaching out to ask for help assessing their situations, adapting their businesses, and seeking funding.

The Financial Futures Program created interpreted audio files about unemployment, stimulus checks, and small business EIDL/PPP loans. The recordings are in Arabic, Somali / MaayMaay, Swahili, French, Keran, and Nepali and can be found our YouTube channel. Each recording references links to the [VT Department of Labor Unemployment Application](#) and [Small Business Administration Grants Programs and Eligibility](#) and provides contact information for the Community Ambassador if the viewer would like to learn more. The audio files were created by our Financial Empowerment for New Americans Project Manager, Asma Abunaib, in

collaboration with our Community Ambassadors. And now there will be a hotline with questions answered in the language of the caller. It is the right thing to do at the right time.

These are the people you are working so diligently to make sure will have the resources to add to economic development during, after the pandemic and into a very different future. Yet there are gaps in the aid that might miss and bypass these hard working and creative entrepreneurs. Sue has been working thoughtfully and diligently with a number of people to address those gaps. My sincere plea is not to forget these people in the foundational budget and to find the avenues in the CARES funding to promote and ensure that they have a chance at success.

Thank you for your leadership

Jan F. Demers
CVOEO