

Tenleytown Main Street

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TESTIMONY OF LEIGH CATHERINE MILES, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, TENLEYTOWN MAIN STREET TO THE COMMITTEE ON BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Chairman McDuffie and members of the Committee on Business and Economic Development, my name is Leigh Catherine Miles and I am the Executive Director of Tenleytown Main Street, a position I have held since January 2016. I thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Department of Small and Local Business Development (DSLBD), the DC Main Streets program, and the Clean Team program.

When I began preparing my testimony earlier this year, I thought to highlight Tenleytown Main Street's cultural programming that brings tens of thousands of customers to local businesses; the work we have done to improve urban greenspace and develop green infrastructure to improve the walkability and health of our corridor; our investments in storefront renovations; and the new businesses we've been able to attract to Tenleytown. While that work over the past year has been crucial to the growth of our business district, it took place before the pandemic. It pales in comparison to the work Tenleytown Main Street, and Main Streets across the city, are doing right now to help small businesses navigate the myriad and immediate challenges they are facing.

So today, I would like to focus on our recent work during the District's public health emergency, as I believe it demonstrates the power of Main Street programs. Our local businesses are facing an unprecedented economic crisis, with the overwhelming majority experiencing upwards of 80% loss in revenue. We are on the frontlines providing support to sustain businesses in the short-term and position them to rebound in the future. As community-based organizations, we have the ability to rapidly pivot to respond to the specific needs of our businesses. Since mid-March TMS has:

- Awarded nearly \$45,000 in financial and technical assistance grants and recovery supplies to small businesses in Tenleytown. This assistance is equivalent to 30% of our total DC Main Street grant.
- Provided 500 hours of technical assistance to help businesses adapt their operations, access government relief programs, and apply for local and national financial assistance
- Launched a COVID-19 hub on our website to connect customers with businesses and businesses to financial and technical support
- Published regular Tenleytown Business Briefs with up-to-date information on financial and technical assistance programs, policy changes impacting businesses, operational guidance, and other relevant information. Local business owners and managers have read these briefs more than 10,600 times.
- And just this week, TMS, at the request of DSLBD, led the distribution of PPE care packages to more than 100 businesses in Ward 3 as part of a citywide distribution program.

Throughout, we have remained a trusted resource during these turbulent times. PetMAC, a 13-year woman-owned business, told TMS that without the Main Street's help with their application, they would not have received a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) loan. Minority-owned martial arts studio, JTR Jujutsu used a TMS grant to keep their staff employed, enabling them to move classes for their current clients online and retain their membership. "TMS has earned the rank of 'first responders' in my book," said owner Danladi Whitten. And Joseph Oh, the owner of Coffee Nature, told TMS that: "Our gross sales dropped more than 80% during the COVID-19 pandemic even though we were allowed to have the coffee shop open for carry out and delivery. Tenleytown Main Street provided the best service to find the information to apply for grants and find the funds to survive this pandemic."

I reference these examples not to pat ourselves on the back, but to highlight the tangible impact Main Street programs have on the survival of small, independent business owners.

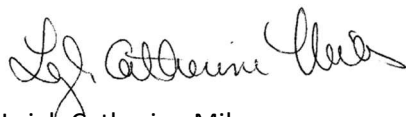
I am grateful to DSLBD Director Kristi Whitfield and her staff, including Cristina Amoruso and Jennifer Prats, who work tirelessly on behalf of the District's businesses. Tenleytown Main Street has benefited from their advice, expertise, and support at all hours of the day and night as we rapidly pivoted to respond to emergent business needs.

I also want to pause to acknowledge our partner Career Path DC and the Wisconsin Avenue Clean Team, who have continued to provide vital clean and safe services throughout the pandemic. The team, comprised of two full-time and one part-time crew members, does an outsized job in keeping our sidewalks clean and accessible and our Main Street welcoming for visitors. Covering 2.2 miles of Wisconsin Avenue, six days a week, the team annually removes more than five tons of litter, cleans graffiti from 100 properties, and tends nearly 340 street trees.

Most importantly, I thank Mayor Bowser, the DC Council, and this committee for their continued commitment to and investment in Main Street programs. This fiscal year, Tenleytown Main Street will match that investment nearly 50 cents for every DC Main Streets grant dollar through privately raised funds.

I urge the committee to support the mayor's FY21 budget, which sustains funding for the city's 24 Main Streets. We may not know what new challenges lie ahead during a year already rife with social, health, and economic crises. With your full support the Main Streets will ensure our local businesses stand ready to meet them.

Submitted respectfully by



Leigh Catherine Miles

Executive Director

On June 3, 2020