



Testimony of Tamara Bryant

on behalf of

Fayetteville State University-Veterans Business Outreach Center

U.S. House of Representatives

Committee on Small Business

*Community Support: Entrepreneurial Development and Beyond*

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Good morning, I am Tamara Bryant. I am the director of the Veterans Business Outreach Center at Fayetteville State University serving the states of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Kentucky. The Veterans Business Outreach Center or VBOC is the Small Business Administration's program that provides business training, counseling, and SBA resource partner referrals to active duty service members, National Guard & Reserve personnel, veterans, and military spouses interested in starting or growing a small business. The SBA has 20 organizations participating in this cooperative agreement and serving as Veterans Business Outreach Centers (VBOC) across the mainland US and one in Hawaii. I would like to thank Ranking Member Alma Adams and Chairman Trent Kelly Representative for the invitation today to share with you VBOC's entrepreneurial development programs, a collaboration of resources and partnerships to help build stronger entrepreneurial communities and to increase the success rate of Veteran-owned businesses.

VBOC's core competencies are entrepreneurial development training designed to deliver interactive and experiential workshops that give the attendee the opportunity to walk away with tangible outcomes and takeaways they can immediately employ in their business. One major point of entry to VBOC services is during the active duty service member's transition out process in a training called Boots to Business. This is a two-day training workshop conducted at military branches that introduces our target audience to the idea of entrepreneurship. The training is taught by VBOC and other SBA resource partners including Small Business Development Centers, SCORE and Women's Business Centers. Last fiscal year, Fayetteville State University's VBOC conducted 68 training sessions. The 20-VBOC's as a whole conducted 607 training sessions across the country. Our second core competency is business counseling that assists clients with evaluating the feasibility of a business concept and turns it into an actionable

plan, start-up assistance/expansion, business planning, loan package assistance, and more. Third, is our resource referral program, VBOC works closely with other SBA resources partners across the U.S. when a specific area of expertise or greater assistance is needed. For instance, if a client needs to get a Veterans Administration (VA) certification as a VOSB or SDVOSB we will refer the client to the Procurement Technical Assistance Center who are certified to do VA certifications. The entrepreneurial development training, collaboration of resources and community support are critical success factors for VBOC's mission which I will elaborate on.

Fayetteville State University Veterans Business Outreach Center (FSU-VBOC), since its inception in 2010, is committed to assisting veterans, transitioning soldiers, active duty, guard, reservist, and spouses to start, purchase or grow a small business. FSU VBOC is located in North Carolina with a total population of 790,000 Veterans who reside in each of the 100 counties across the state. Close proximity to the largest Army Installation, Fort Bragg-home of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne. VBOC is hosted at Fayetteville State University's (FSU), College of Business and Economics, a Historically Black College University (HBCU). FSU is a constituent member of the University of the North Carolina System, and it is known for its support of military-affiliated students through serving large numbers of active duty soldiers, their spouses and families, as well as veterans. The college has over 6,200 students with almost 25 percent of that population being the military community. This collaboration with FSU is a natural fit for VBOC's target customers and mission. It has allowed VBOC the opportunity to collaborate/participate in the College of Business and Economics entrepreneurship programs such as small business consultant teams. The small business consultant teams are undergraduate or graduate students (many of the students are military affiliated, minorities and women) that work closely with our clients to solve business needs in areas of marketing research, feasibility studies, and financial analysis, and to help them

pursue new opportunities. These student engagement opportunities provide the students with real-world practicum educational experience focused on helping small businesses and our clients receive valuable assistance at no charge. In addition to collaborating with CBE, we conduct government and corporate procurement training to better position the target audience to compete for all levels of contracting, and judge entrepreneurial pitch competitions, to name a few undertakings. This collaboration allows VBOC to promote and market our services to military students and alumni, provide our clients access to student internships, provide government procurement technical training/plans rooms, workshops/seminars taught by awarded winning entrepreneurial professors, as well as, access to state-of-the-art classrooms and technologies.

FSU-VBOC is extremely fortunate to have great partnerships with highly valued resource partners to help service our clients in an exemplary manner. VBOC's network offers invaluable services and programs for our veterans and military community, however, we do have our challenges for example, not having centers in each state, which leaves several VBOC's to cover multiple states. Therefore, it is critical for the VBOC's to leverage other resource partners to assist their client's needs. We understand our clients come with a unique technical skill set, impeccable leadership skills, core values, and a mission-focused mindset but often they may lack the business acumen skills or the ability to transfer their military skills into an entrepreneurial career pathway. VBOC's entrepreneurial development training, business counseling and referral services address those needs with the assistance of SBA Resource Partners, local /state agencies and community support which becomes an added-value to their clients. It is imperative that we know and understand the population of our target customers and the available resources to meet the client needs and manage and exceed their expectations. FSU-VBOC client base is very diverse serving over 1,400 clients this past fiscal year, 47% minority and 21% women with various needs in access

to capital, securing government contracts/certifications, business plan development and access to human capital. Having a clear understanding of who we serve and what their needs are allows VBOC to leverage the right resources and provide in-depth counseling that results in impactful outcomes. I will be highlighting two successful clients for whom VBOC leveraged other resources that yielded the clients' great results.

Marcella Eubanks, Army Veteran owner of Bravery Kids Gym, came to VBOC with her idea of owning an all-inclusive children's gym with a focus on children with special needs. She received assistance with developing her business plan/start-up assistance and referral to a local community bank to obtain funding. She came back to the center for other services because she viewed the staff at VBOC as a trusted advisor and was willing to work with other agencies. She's been referred to the Syracuse University V-WISE pitch competitions, SBTDC for specialized training in QuickBooks and utilized CBE student internships. These referrals have helped her win pitch competitions, hire 6 part-time employees and improve the business' operational and marketing systems.

Robert Fletcher, Army Veteran owner of Bob's Smokin' Southern BBQ Sauce, attended VBOC's annual Entrepreneurial Bootcamp for Service Disabled Veterans. The week-long training provides a learning and development opportunity for veterans and spouses who are interested in starting a business. Robert's idea of his famous barbecue sauce concept started in the boot camp. He later worked closely with the VBOC staff to form the business. Robert was also introduced to one of VBOC's core strategic partners the North Carolina Veterans Business Association (NC Vet Biz). Its mission is to support, educate and connect all veterans in commerce in North Carolina with resources to become successful in business. The association assisted Robert with additional distribution channels to get his sauce to the market. The training, counseling and partnership

assisted Mr. Fletcher in operating nationally with sauces now in over 200 stores, as well as being offered expansion internationally to Australia, Germany, and Okinawa. He will soon be a part of a Netflix documentary scheduled to begin production in late 2018. These are two of many success stories demonstrating FSU-VBOC collaborations with resource partners, and local organizations to deliver desirable outcomes for their clients. FSU-VBOC's impact on the US economy's during the past fiscal year includes: contributing to 41 businesses started, 537 jobs created and retained, 2.2 million loans acquired, and 1.3 million contracts awarded with the assistance of great partnerships and community support.

Veteran-Owned businesses are the pillars of the American economy. Nearly 1 in 10 businesses are veteran-owned, generating approximately 1.1 billion of the nation's total sales per year. These businesses hire 5.03 million people per year, and have an annual payroll of \$195 Billion (data collected by the Office of Veterans Business Development). Veteran-owned businesses are found across diverse industries with the above average representation in finance/insurance, transportation/warehouse, construction, and agriculture/forestry/fishing. The State of North Carolina sees growth in these industry sectors as well. FSU-VBOC partnered with NC Department of Agriculture, USDA and NC Department of Veterans and Military Affairs to host annual Veterans in Agriculture summit to promote, support and expose more Veterans to the agriculture industry. Veteran women-owned businesses steadily increase each year, (15.2% of businesses are owned by veteran women). To continue the steady increase, VBOC co-hosted "A New Mission: Military Women as Entrepreneurs Conference" with the Women's Business Center of N.C. across the state. VBOC's recognized the challenges these veterans faced as business owners in obtaining access to capital and government/corporate procurement. To assist our clients with these critical needs FSU-VBOC partnered with the North Carolina Veterans Business

## Community Support: Entrepreneurial Development and Beyond, a VBOC Perspective

Association to provide veterans and the military community with access to more procurement opportunities, removing barriers to entry and networking opportunities. The past fiscal year for the VBOC network was marked by very significant levels of outreach, training, and services for veteran-owned and military spouses' small businesses. Over 1,700 training events held, 178 businesses created, and 1,006 jobs created and retained, 243 prime and subcontractors awarded, and 8.5 million dollars in SBA loans approved. Starting May 1<sup>st</sup> , the award expands the existing VBOC network from 20 to 22 centers across the nation, ensuring 100 percent geographic coverage. Each of the 22 awardees displays proven commitment and continued excellence in providing comprehensive entrepreneurial services to the veteran and military community. Most of the VBOC centers cover multiple states and attend every Boots to Business course, all with a budget of \$6,000,000. The 22 Veterans Business Outreach Center through its cooperative agreement is committed to ensuring that every service member and military spouse has the resources they need in their local communities to start and operate small businesses, achieve post-service career success, and strengthen the Nation's economy. My ask is for your continued support of VBOC services to increase the success rate of business ownership with this highly skilled workforce. Again, thank you for this opportunity to share and represent the VBOC network-a program that helps our service men and women, and Veterans who fought, protected and served this GREAT NATION!

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Tamara Bryant, Director  
tcbryant@uncfsu.edu  
Fayetteville State University-Veterans Business Outreach Center  
www.FSUVBOC.com  
1200 Murchison Rd  
Fayetteville NC ,28301  
(910) 672-1107

