

**U.S. HOUSE COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS**

**Nydia M. Velazquez, Chairwoman**

**Hybrid Hearing: “The Next Steps for the Paycheck Protection Program”**

**Wednesday, March 10, 2021**

Witness Testimony:

Ms. Lisa Bombin

President & CEO

Unico Communications, Inc.

San Antonio, Texas

Thank you Chairwoman Velazquez and the Members of this committee for affording me a moment of your time to share my story as a Latina Small Business Owner.

I have been the proud owner of Unico Communications, a 16-year event production company and a Latina-owned business headquartered in San Antonio, Texas. We have a long history of producing large-scale events for the nation’s most reputable non-profit organizations. I am honored to represent the larger event industry that includes master story-tellers, writers, planners, producers, audio and video engineers, caterers and so many more magicians that work behind the scenes of our most memorable celebrations, concerts, galas, conferences and the like. Along with hundreds of other event companies across the country, the pandemic left my business scrambling for a new plan and a method to sustain my staff and execute payroll in the midst of so much uncertainty.

The merciless effects of the resulting shutdown were evident in the swift volume of event cancellations that followed. Our business came to an abrupt halt. The only alternative was to suspend my own salary to retain as much cashflow enabling me to keep our staff secure and fully-employed for the immediate future.

After several emotionally exhaustive days of seeking a new business strategy and plan, we had a glimmer of hope when Congress established the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) in the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act). To say the initial roll-out was “problematic”, may be an understatement. I, like so many other small businesses, had been banking with a well known national bank when the application window opened. And like so many small minority-owned businesses, we were left in the dark. Our financial institution offered no method of submitting an application, rather a landing page to “stay tuned” for more details. We found ourselves seeing the hours slip away and feeling the anxiety rise as our peers and fellow business-owners confirmed

their applications had been successfully processed, all while payroll deadlines loomed for our team.

After multiple attempts to submit our application we contacted the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce to seek advice and technical assistance. The USHCC recommended that we submit a PPP application through a small community bank as they had been seeing an increasing track record of success from other members across the country. Furthermore, the USHCC was one of the few national organizations providing technical assistance in both English and Spanish to minority-owned businesses and worked with the SBA to have them translate their resources into multiple languages. We had no list from which to start, so my husband and I began making calls and scouring the internet through the night, to research local banks across our state to see if they would accept applications from new customers. We were fortunate to have had success in submitting and securing this PPP loan through Pioneer Bank, a small Texas regional institution. Sadly, not all businesses like mine were able to secure a PPP loan and have succumbed to closure. According to a study published by Small Business Majority which surveyed small and minority owned business owners: One in 3 say the process of applying for the PPP was challenging due to the calculations and paperwork involved. Nearly one in four said that finding a lender willing to accept their application was challenging.

Now more than ever, small minority-owned businesses need the U.S. Small Business Administration and its portfolio of loans and technical assistance programs. Our business' membership with the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce helped me navigate this convoluted process through their communications. Furthermore, I received technical guidance from the University of Texas at San Antonio's Small Business Development Center (UTSA-SBDC) and additional funding through the City of San Antonio's Recovery Grant Program facilitated by LiftFund, a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI).

These three entities were critical in my business success during one of the most unprecedented economic times in American history. If it had not been for the forgivable loans built into the CARES Act, our business would not have been able to survive because we could not sustain more debt.

As a small business owner, I call upon our Members of Congress to expand PPP loans for our nation's small and minority-owned businesses, and to provide more support and financial resources to the SBA and the Minority Business Development Agency to fund critical technical assistance, in multiple languages, through public private partnerships with Chambers of Commerce and other business associations across the country. Our road to recovery is still vast and organizations like these need to be funded and sustained to continue helping businesses like mine navigate the ongoing economic crisis.

Thank you again Chairwoman Velazquez and members of this committee for your leadership and continued legislative collaboration to ensure the economic survival of America's more than 30 million small businesses, of which 4.7 million are Hispanic-owned.