TESTIMONY OF ROBERT A. WEIMAR, PE, BCEE
CHIEF OF PROGRAM MANAGEMENT
THE METROPOLITAN DISTRICT

House Bill 5800

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Feltman, Senator Fasano, Representative Bacchiochi and distinguished members of the committee, my name is Robert Weimar and I am the Chief of the Program Management Unit at the Metropolitan District. For your information, the Program Management Unit is the division within the District that is responsible for the execution and the delivery of the Clean Water Project, the most ambitious capital improvement project which the District has seen in its 80-year history.

The Clean Water Project is much more than a project that will replace and repair the aging infrastructure which serves the 400,000 customers of the District. The project itself represents a unique chance to create meaningful opportunity for many businesses and individuals, especially minority-owned contracting firms and minority individuals who wish to become engaged in the contracting field. The District and the community have been diligently working together toward the common goal of ensuring that these opportunities are realized.

Over the past year, the District has convened a Strategic Advisory Committee to examine nominal barriers to minority participation in our projects. In mid-2007, we engaged the services of Attorney Franklin Lee, a nationally renowned civil rights lawyer. He will assist the District in the conduct of a Disparity Study, as well as to develop interim strategies to increase participation of minority, woman's and disadvantaged businesses in this project. The Disparity Study will comply with Supreme Court requirements for examining minority availability and capacity for the District's projects, and it will establish a nominal basis for set-aside criteria for District projects. This process is underway now.

There is no question that the District's Charter requires legislative action to modernize its Charter procurement requirements. It currently does not permit the flexibility that is necessary to facilitate the growth of small, minority and women's businesses. In addition to the steps mentioned above, I am pleased to report that the District and minority community leaders recently have expressed their commitment to a partnership to create a legally defensible, inclusive program which will grow local businesses and the workforce. We have agreed to work together to develop programs to create sustainable opportunities for local small, minority and women's businesses. The District looks forward to creating a model procurement system of which we all can be proud.

While the Metropolitan District supports the concepts of House Bill 5800 to facilitate inclusion of small, minority and women's business in our capital projects, we respectfully request the opportunity to work together with the committee and community representatives to further refine its terms to ensure that our mutual goals are accomplished.

Thank you and we appreciate your consideration of this critically important issue.