HB 6383

Testimony before the Commerce Committee

By the

Spanish American Merchants Association (SAMA)

Good Morning Chairman LeBeau and Chairman Berger and Members of the Committee:

My name is Frank Alvarado, and I am the Director of the New Haven and Willimantic Offices of the Spanish American Merchants Association, first I want to thank you for allowing SAMA to testify this morning and to thank you for your continued support of SAMA over the years.

SAMA was established in 1982 and currently operates three offices in Hartford, New Haven and Willimantic, in addition we also currently provide services in Meriden, New Britain, Waterbury and Danbury while receiving numerous requests for services from clients in cities like Bridgeport and Stamford. In other words we receive request for services from cities and towns that have a heavy presence of Hispanic owned businesses. But, I want to make it clear that SAMA provides services to anyone who requests our services.

The services provided by SAMA to our clients can range from as simple as interpreting a letter from the IRS, DRS or a local assessor to helping our clients complete applications for the Food Stamp Program, WIC program or any other type of application that they are having a problem with. SAMA will also attend Board of Zoning Appeals meetings or other public hearings with our clients to make sure that they are able to explain their request correctly. Our ability to provide all types of technical assistance to our clients is an important aspect of the SAMA mission.

Another cornerstone of the SAMA mission are our training programs, which are anchored by our Computer and QuickBooks training program that is given at each of our offices at least twice a year for ten weeks. This program teaches our clients how to use several computer programs and also focuses on the QuickBooks Program, which we feel is very important to small business owners because it allows them to keep track of their financial condition at all times. Others training programs include a marketing program for City of Hartford residents and businesses, a QuickBooks program tailored for general construction contractors, we are also certified to provide the OSHA 10 hour Construction Certificate training and the OSHA 10 hour General industry Certificate. SAMA also provides the ServSafe Food Management Course which is required for anyone who wants to operate any type of food service business. Another training program which SAMA is certified to teach is the TIPS Program which is required for people serving alcohol to the public. SAMA has also partnered with the State Farm Insurance Company to provide a training course for potential insurance agents.

We have also just learned that the WIC program will now require that all merchants who are part of the WIC have an e-mail address and use of a computer, so SAMA will develop a training program for these merchants, so that they will not be subject to losing an important aspect of their daily sales.

SAMA also strives to be a part of the community, our offices are used by many local organizations to hold meetings and other events and we have always partnered with other organizations like the Small Business Administration, The State of CT Small Business Development Center, The UI Company to bring educational and cost saving workshops to our clients, SAMA has also been a part of the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program, which assist low income tax payers prepare their taxes for the past six years.

In summation I want to leave you with some information on the number of people that we have been able to serve over the past three years.

SAMA has reviewed over 100 business plans.

We have made loans totaling over 2.9 million dollars to 55 businesses.

We estimate that we have been able to create 233 new jobs and help retain close to 400 jobs.

We have provided Technical Assistance on Permits, licensing and zoning matters to over 600 clients.

Our Computer and QuickBooks training program has been attended by over 400 people.

We estimate that we have provided technical assistance on other matters to well over 2800 people.

Finally, at SAMA we are committed to making sure that all small businesses that we work with know exactly what is expected of them when it comes to properly registering their businesses with the local, state and federal departments and agencies that they are required to. We believe that this results in added revenues to the cities and towns that they are located in and to the State of Connecticut. We are very proud of the results that we have been able to achieve over the past several years and we look forward to continuing to provide these very important services to the Small Businesses in Connecticut.