

09 April 2024

Chairman Marvin Abney  
House Committee on Finance  
Room 35, 82 Smith Street  
Providence, RI, 02908

***Testimony in support of H7482: resolves that \$500,000 in the FY25 state budget be directly allocated to the RI Black Business Association for business and workforce development.***

Dear Chairman Abney and members of the House Committee on Finance,

My name is Zara A. Salmon and I am a resident of Pawtucket. I am submitting the following letter as testimony in support of H7483 sponsored by Representative Nathan Biah. The bill makes a critical investment in the RI Black Business Association, which means it makes a critical investment in growing small businesses and economic opportunity in underserved areas.

I am a RIBBA member, graduate of their Emerging Leaders Competition, and participant of their 2022 Young Adult Business Pitch Competition.

I support RIBBA because they have supported me. The laptop I'm writing this letter on was bought with the \$500 I received from RIBBA for being a participant in their 2022 Young Adult Business Competition. Though I didn't place in the competition, RIBBA still financially supported the young business owners who took time out of their Saturday to pitch their business. That financial support meant a lot to me as I did not have a laptop for personal use. Through the mentorship of their Director of Policy, Kristina Contreras-Fox, I curated a series of events through my business, CRAVEInfused, which led to me finding a non-profit organization in the Cannabis Policy Coalition. Our coalition recently introduced #H7855 with Kristina and RIBBA playing integral roles in this development. While I do believe you should give RIBBA \$500,000, I also think that number should be quadrupled to \$2 million *at the least*. The difference between RIBBA and a lot of other organizations is that they prioritize black people while still supporting other minorities and low-income folks. The successes that I have are because I have mentorship from people that look like me and understand certain unique challenges that I have that other non-profit organizations that claim to be helping black people simply don't. I'm not looking for a savior in the work I do, I'm looking for a partner. A partner that will continue to support me through my journey while challenging me to be the best version of myself. A perfect example is being able to call Director Contreras-Fox with questions on how to lead an organization efficiently, making sure the work gets done, while being empathetic to your subordinates' own challenges within their work. Another example brings in President Ranglin. If I ever see her out at an event, she pulls me into her network, introducing my work and highlighting my accolades. Those connections mean everything to a 27-year old, black, female entrepreneur who also has a full-time position at Brown University. Speaking of Brown, Director Contreras-Fox helped me get this position by being one of my recommenders. I can write a dissertation on the support RIBBA has given me. By allocating RIBBA with that funding, you are

investing money into Rhode Island. Black people want dignified work but oftentimes our community lacks professional mentors that could get us to where we need to be. This has nothing to do with education and has everything to do with the lack of investment in low-income schools that are often disproportionately black and brown. RIBBA has filled that void in Rhode Island for not just the black community, but minority people across Rhode Island.

I urge the members of the House Committee on Finance to please give H7482 your full support and send it out of committee to the House floor with a recommendation of passage. Thank you.

Sincerely,

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