

WCOE Members Heard: WOSB Accountability Bill Introduced

Following the WCOE Washington Leadership Conference, **Senator Joni Ernst's** (R-IA) staff reached out to WCOE for support of the Senator's bill, [S. 1470](#), the Accountability in Women-Owned Small Business Contracting Act. The bill would allow agencies to count only prime and subcontract awards to SBA-certified women-owned small businesses toward a government-wide goal of 5% of federal contracting dollars going to WOSBs, would close some loopholes regarding self-certified companies and require accountability for agencies that do not meet set-aside goals. WCOE was quoted in the [Senator's press release](#) as follows:

"WCOE has long-held that one of the reasons federal agencies do not meet the WOSB goals is because there is not enough transparency and agencies are not held accountable when they don't meet the goals. The legislation introduced by Senator Ernst takes an important step toward accountability for federal agencies failing to meet WOSB participation goals by requiring them to submit a report to Congress and testify about the report to the Senate Small Business and Entrepreneurship and the House Small Business Committees outlining remediation plans moving forward. The importance of this step cannot be overstated and WCOE applauds Senator Ernst for moving forward with reforms to help empower women small businesses and for taking a fresh look at the barriers facing women in the federal marketplace today," **said Lee Cunningham, Chairman of Women Construction Owners and Executives (WCOE) Legislative Committee.**

Please contact your Senators about cosponsoring and supporting this bill. [Find your Senators](#)

Congress: Keep Congressional Members Informed on WCOE Issues

WCOE member input is especially important now to keep the focus on issues important to WCOE members. We must work to keep funding fights for Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 from sucking all the legislative oxygen out of the air on Capitol Hill. The end of the federal government's FY is September 30 by which time all 12 Appropriations bills are supposed to be passed and signed by the president. Congress repeatedly misses that deadline, punts to Continuing Resolutions (CRs) to avoid a government shutdown and, in recent memory, funds the government with a big "Omnibus" bill, rather than individual appropriations bills. WCOE members may recall that to avoid a debt limit crisis, Congress passed [The Fiscal Responsibility Act](#), which was signed into law. The bipartisan agreement includes a provision that will automatically cut government spending by 1% if Congress does not pass all 12 FY2024 appropriations bills individually by January 1, 2024. Senate Republicans are worried the House GOP's decision to write government funding bills at levels below those laid out in the debt ceiling bill will create a tough road for lawmakers to avert a government shutdown.

Congress: Help WCOE Keep Attention on Issues Important to Women in the Construction Industry

The House passed two Financial Services bills and they now go to the Senate for consideration:

- [H.R. 2792](#), *Small Entity Update Act*, introduced by **Rep. Ann Wagner (R-MO)**, which would require the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to report on and revise the definition of *small entity* every five years. Agencies are required to consider the impact of their rules on small businesses under the Regulatory Flexibility Act.
- [H.R. 2796](#), *Promoting Opportunities for Non-Traditional Capital Formation Act*, **Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA)** which would require the Office of the Advocate for Small Business Capital Formation within the SEC to create educational resources and host events for underrepresented, rural, and disaster-affected small businesses.

The Small Business Committee has passed two bills WCOE hopes will help promote the interests of women construction firms.

- [H.R. 1541](#), The Small Business Workforce Pipeline Act, introduced by **Rep. Jason Crow (D-CO)**, and a bipartisan group of House members, to help address the workforce shortage for small businesses, by allowing Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs) to aid small businesses in the area of apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and job training programs. There are now approximately 160 SBDCs across the U.S. and WCOE has encouraged SBA to do more work to promote the construction industry in those centers. Currently only a few SBDCs focus on construction.
- [H.R.1730](#), Supporting Small Business and Career and Technical Education Act of 2023, was introduced again this year by Small Business **Chair Roger Williams (R-TX)** and Rep. Marie Newman (D-IL). A companion bill has been introduced in the Senate, [S. 936](#). Last Congress, WCOE provided input for the Senate bill by **Sen. Roger Marshall (R-KS)**. The legislation, working with Small Business Development Centers (SBDCs), would assist small businesses in hiring graduates from career and technical education programs. As noted earlier, WCOE has been working to get SBDCs more involved in the construction industry.

The House Small Business Committee held a hearing titled “Assisting Entrepreneurs: Examining Private and Public Resources Helping Small Businesses.” **Watch the full hearing [here](#)**. Chairman Williams issued the following statement after the hearing.

“Today’s hearing allowed us to examine the landscape of public and private resources available to small businesses,” said Chairman Williams (R-TX). “Our nation’s job creators dedicate their livelihoods to the products and services they bring to the marketplace. It is important for Main Street to understand they have other, oftentimes better, private sector alternatives to help grow their businesses.”

While private sector programs are important to small businesses, WCOE notes that women in the construction industry still face barriers in both the public and private marketplace and that programs designed to help women compete successfully for contract awards are still vital for women contractors to succeed and grow in the industry.

The Change Order bill, supported by WCOE, has been reintroduced in the House.

- [H.R. 2726](#), the Small Business Payment for Performance Act, has been reintroduced **by Rep. Pete Stauber, (R-MN), along with Reps. Scott Peters (D-CA), Marc Veasey (-TX), and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA)**. This bipartisan bill, also introduced in the 117th Congress, will ensure prompt payment for change orders requested and approved by Contracting Officers on federal construction projects. This is especially important for women-owned construction firms because for women, access to capital is still an issue. WCOE has been working with the Construction Industry Procurement Coalition on this bill in previous Congressional sessions.

Agency News

WCOE has emphasized to the SBA and the Administration, the importance of getting infrastructure money out and working to help communities and the economy, stressing that for women-owned businesses, the playing field is not yet level. The Administration is implementing and coordinating spending of historic proportions for infrastructure. It is a critical time to reform federal contracting procedures to make it easier for women construction firms to successfully compete in the federal marketplace. [SBA Administrator Isabella Guzman](#) took to the road with White House Senior Advisor and Infrastructure Coordinator, Mitch Landrieu, advocating for infrastructure money to small businesses.