



FR ENGINEERING
G R O U P

March 1, 2021

To: Rhode Island House Committee on Labor

Re: House Bill No. 5717

Written Testimony in Opposition

Stephanie M. Robot, P.E.

Dear Chair Williams & First Vice Chair Messier & Second Vice Chair Alzate:

FR Engineering Group, Inc. (FREG) is a recently certified WBE and DBE firm in the State of Rhode Island. FREG is authorized to practice engineering in the State and I am a registered Professional Engineer in the State of Rhode Island.

I am in opposition to House Bill No. 5717 which proposes to eliminate “women” as a minority owned business enterprise (MBE).

The construction and engineering fields are still dominated predominately by men and male-owned businesses. Because of this, women owned construction and engineering firms face a number of barriers around starting and maintaining businesses. One of these barriers includes the idea that women are less qualified and capable than their male counterparts in the engineering and construction fields. Removing the term “women” from the MBE definition does not eliminate the existence of these barriers. It simply sets the starting line for women back even further behind men than it already was.

I graduated with my bachelors in Civil and Environmental Engineering in 2012 and my masters in Civil and Environmental Engineering in 2016 from the University of Rhode Island. I have since worked at two engineering firms prior to opening my own firm in 2019. My graduating class for both degrees was predominately male. Both firms I worked at were also male-dominated. This is due to the fact that women are still underrepresented in the engineering and construction fields. Women are also paid less and are less likely to be promoted to leadership positions than our male counter parts.

My firm specializes in geotechnical engineering (a subset of civil engineering). To the best of my knowledge, we are currently the only women owned geotechnical engineering firm located in the State of Rhode Island. I cannot rationalize how we would not be considered disadvantaged when >95% of the firms we compete against are male-owned.

The WBE/DBE status was one of the main reasons I took the leap to open my own firm. It helped to put me closer to a level playing field with the male-owned firms in the State. Even with the WBE/DBE status, I still often start several steps behind the male-owned firms when bidding on projects. One of the reasons I opened my business was in hopes that I would some day be able to turn it into a successful company where both men, women and minorities can find equal opportunities and equal pay.

Because we are an underrepresented group, women need the DBE/WBE status to compete and have equal opportunities in this industry. Eliminating “women” as MBE’s is severely setting the clock back for women and will hinder our ability to own and operate our own businesses. This would have irreversible economic impacts on women and women-owned businesses during a pandemic that has been shown to disproportionately affect women and their ability to remain in the work place.

Very truly yours,
FR Engineering Group, Inc.

Stephanie M. Robot, P.E.
President
79 Bayside Avenue
Warwick, RI 02888

Phone: 401-575-1569
stephanie.robot@fr-eng.com