



March 1, 2021

TO: Chair Representative Anastasia Williams House Labor Committee
1st Vice Chair Mary Messier House Labor Committee
2nd Vice Chair Karen Alzate House Labor Committee

FROM: Vanasse Hangen Brustlin (VHB)
1 Cedar Street, Suite 400
Providence, RI 02903

RE: VHB Opposition to House Bill 5717 An Act Relating to Public Property and Works – Minority Business Enterprise eliminating women from qualification for MBEs.

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

As a Corporation licensed to do business in Rhode Island, VHB, one of the largest Civil Engineering firms in Rhode Island **respectfully submits this letter in opposition to House Bill 5717 entitled: RELATING TO PUBLIC PROPERTY AND WORKS --MINORITY BUSINESS ENTERPRISE**. VHB opposes this bill for the following reasons:

1. **Impact to woman-owned companies.** More than 50% of the firms listed on the State's Office of Diversity, Equity & Opportunity (ODEO) directory of certified MBE, WBE and DBE firms are in fact woman-owned firms (WBE). These WBE firms would effectively be removed from the list of eligible firms qualifying to meet MBE goals on solicitations. Historically, women in the engineering industry have faced roadblocks and barriers to entry. Eliminating *women* in the definition of minority thereby disqualifies them from the MBE program would have serious and adverse consequences for these woman-owned businesses.
2. **Impact to minority-owned companies.** The bill defines a minority as a resident of the state, not the United States. This further reduces the number of available vendors eligible to meet MBE goals on solicitations. Many firms are physically located in adjacent states and they would all be removed from the approved vendor list under this bill unless they have an office in Rhode Island.

In summary, VHB opposes the passage of H5717 for the aforementioned reasons.

Sincerely,

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