



October 1st, 2021

Honorable Nydia M. Velazquez, Chairwoman
U.S House of Representatives Committee on Small Business
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subject: Support Increase Of Appropriations To Restaurant Revitalization Fund

Dear Chairwoman Velazquez, Ranking Member Luetkemeyer, Members of Alaska's Congressional Delegation, and Committee Members:

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce supports the replenishment of monies to the Restaurant Revitalization Fund through the amendment of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (H.R.3807). As many understand, this past year and a half has been difficult on businesses across the country, especially restaurants. There are a large number of small businesses still struggling to stay afloat, Alaskans included. Small businesses serve as an economic driver for our region, as well as sustaining culture and the livelihood of many local citizens. It is crucial that we support them in their recovery and reestablishment throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

An additional \$60 billion in FY2021 allocated to the Restaurant Revitalization Fund would help the thousands of businesses that didn't make priority group funding, or before the initial \$28.6 billion ran out. Our members have voiced that having the opportunity to apply for funds, if replenished, they would use these awards to:

- Ensure employee retention and secure payroll.
- Business overhead (Utilities, bills, rent, overdue equipment replacement & repairs).
- Offset rising costs of employment due to staffing challenges/labor shortage.

We encourage you to take action on this issue urgently. As currently drafted, H.R.3807 would help businesses in Alaska and across the country respond to COVID-19. Alaska's restaurants are still struggling to recover, and the lower 48 is no different. We encourage the prioritization of business owners who did not have an opportunity to receive funds during the initial

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distribution. They were not given the opportunity that priority or initial qualifiers were.

The Greater Fairbanks Chamber of Commerce represents over 650 business members throughout Interior Alaska. We work to advocate for the best business environment, promote economic strength and growth for interior Alaska, and to develop the resources and networks enterprising people utilize to share knowledge.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jinnel Choiniere".

Jinnel Choiniere
President/CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angie M. Tallant".

Angie Tallant
Board Chair

Enclosures: Chamber Members from the Food and Beverage Industry Who Voiced Harm by the Lack of RRF Funds; Hot Shot Sisters Testimonial

Cc:

Honorable Nydia M. Velazquez, Chair, U.S House Committee on Small Business

Honorable Lisa Murkowski, U.S Senate

Honorable Daniel Sullivan, U.S Senate

Honorable Don Young, U.S House of Representatives

Honorable Mike Dunleavy, Governor of Alaska



ENCLOSURE 1: CHAMBER MEMBERS FROM THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY WHO VOICED HARM BY THE LACK OF RRF FUNDS

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ENCLOSURE 2: HOT SHOT SISTERS TESTIMONIAL

My name is Krystal Wester. I am the owner and founder of Hot Shot Sisters, Juice Bar & Café. I have owned and operated my own business since I was 19 years old, 3 of which have been located in Fairbanks, Alaska : 1. Northern Grinds, A coffee shop that was located within the Tanana Valley Clinic, 2. Shave Ice Sisters, a seasonal business that operated consecutively from the summer of 2012 – 2020 when Covid-19 halted all events 3. Hot Shot Sisters, opened in 2019 now consists of 2 locations. I am an “Alaskan transplant” having moved here with my family in the military when I was in middle school. I am a 2006 graduate of Lathrop High School, graduating as Student Body President and Yearbook Editor. At age 19 I opened my very first coffee shop, The Daily Grind & Bagel Company, which opened in Hawaii on the military base of Schofield Barracks, with a mission to provide our military members “A taste of Home”. I graduated from Hawaii Pacific University with a BS in Diplomacy and Military Studies. I currently serve as Vice President on the board of Directors for the non-profit, because of Q. I moved back to Alaska in 2010 and have since established 3 businesses, supported my local economy through business and providing jobs, as well as donated and volunteered countless hours to local non-profits and charities working to make a difference. I list this snapshot of a resume in hopes to paint a picture that depicts my hardworking and service centered nature.

Our mission at Hot Shot Sisters is to help our community flourish by nourishing the body, mind & inner leader. We do this by providing an environment and product line up that stimulates health, energy & wellness. In July of 2019 I purchased a drive thru coffee shop as the original start up for the Juice Bar & Café. In September of 2019 we introduced Fairbanks to the wholesome world of Fresh Pressed Juices & Smoothies. In October of 2019 we were maxing out our small space and began looking for more room to expand and transfer our production process to. In January of 2020 we signed a lease and received keys to a new retail/production site and began our next step towards transformation. In February of 2020 we opened our 2nd location with excitement. In March of 2020 the whole world shut down.

In the months to follow; full of the unknowns, shutdowns, and inconsistencies, many businesses like myself were on high alert to “pivot, change & adapt” where needed. Although many changes took place in my business during those first few months, my mind was set on controlling what I could control. However, in order to keep my team intact and business open, I found myself cutting into the last of my personal savings to pay payroll and business expenses. Over those months, I spent countless hours researching grants, viable loans and fundraising options that could possibly give hope where my own savings had diminished, for another open day.

For everything I found, to include the majority of government assistance options, it was all based off a generic “mold” of a business. Compare everything to LY (last year), how many employees were employed in January, what were avg sales in January. I couldn’t necessarily provide any of that information, let alone anything impactful. WHY? Because I didn’t fit the mold. Location #1 opened late 2019 so not a full calendar



year, Location #2 didn't start making sales until February of 2020, and my staffing more than doubled in February of 2020 when Location #2 fully opened. Every time I spoke to a banker or someone who could help me apply or assist with aid, I was always the "well that's a new one" or "you're a special case" and no one could offer a viable solution. However, I always applied and did my best to fight for my case.

When the RRF Grant was announced I jumped for joy that something was being focused on the food industry specifically, AND would factor in more than 1 location AND businesses that opened in 2020!! WOW, this was awesome!! As things rolled out and information became available I made sure to gather my info and reports so I would be ready. Then, I found out that women owned businesses (amongst other minority groups) would have a 2 week priority to apply. Why did this seem important? Well, for us "little guys" we don't always have the luxury to pay someone else to make us a priority, therefore, leaving us to have to find the time to do the work and gather the data ourselves. Remember, this is on top of everything else that small business owners were doing daily, aka EVERYTHING. So, WOW, another awesome glimpse of hope for assistance that may not actually categorize me as a "special case".

Then came the time to apply. As I arose early morning to apply for the RRF Grant (time sensitive, first come, first serve), it was quickly realized, that I still did not fit the mold and could not use the streamlined Square POS portal that had been advertising "ease of applying" to move forward. Going through the Square POS would have allowed the integrated service to pull my reports and information needed on its own, great! However, what I found was it would only allow me to apply for 1 location and the only "eligible" location was the one that opened in 2019, therefore not allowing for a true application for my entire business.

In order to calculate and account for my business as a whole, which consists of 2 locations, I had to switch gears in the moment and apply using the RRF portal. This now meant I had to pull and compare my own reports and numbers, which was no longer going to be a streamlined process and not something I had been prepared for. Now I had to somehow, manually figure out my fit within the 3 formulas given in the RRF packet in order to calculate my monetary request number. Again, there was no specific formula for my business timeline/situation and I had to do my best to piece together the different parts of the formula options that related to my business, in order to come up with my request. No matter what I did, the formulas led to the same ridiculous number of a \$5 Million Dollar Request. I could not figure out how to come up with an actual relative number. In order to be one of the first in the que, at this point, I submitted my absurd request with ALL of my documents, knowing it would lead to needing further information/questions, but hoping this would get me in front of someone who could help me.

I submitted my RRF Grant request on the very first day it opened on May 3, 2021. On May 25th I received a message in the portal that more information was required. I received the necessary information from my CPA and sent it along. No other message or request was made. On June 30, 2021 everyone was notified that the RRF Grant Fund had been closed due to no more funds. Research shows that 278,000 applications were



received and 100,004 of those received grant funding. Of those 100,004 many were recipients of \$5-10 Million dollar grants.

I did not start my business with the intent of needing government assistance and free money hand outs just to keep my doors open. I invested years of hard work and savings into my own dreams so that I could one day invest in helping someone else make theirs come true. This is typically done through creating opportunities. But now instead of creating opportunities, I work tirelessly do crunch numbers and “make things work” as I have spent everything I have and had into keeping my business open, everything short of “future planning”. Honestly, I don’t know how much I would have been eligible for through the RRF and the reality is, anything would have helped. This Grant would have helped with payroll, employee retention & a shot at offering a more competitive wage. It would have assisted in the skyrocketing business overheads and utilities. It would have assisted in a lineup of much needed equipment repairs or new appliances altogether. It would have assisted in reinforced security for my 2 buildings, which would not only appease my insurance but protect my assets. It would have assisted in countless ways that could get us one step closer to looking towards the future and creating opportunities again.

Krystal Wester
Hot Shot Sisters, Owner
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