BECMA
BLACK ECONOMIC COUNCIL
of MASSACHUSETTS

Senator Markey,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and thank you for your leadership on behalf of America's small businesses.

My name is Nicole Obi, and I serve as President and CEO of the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts, known as BECMA. We are a statewide, member-based nonprofit focused on closing the racial wealth gap by helping Black-owned businesses start, grow, and scale, and by strengthening the economic ecosystems that support them.

I appreciate the Committee's focus on uplifting minority entrepreneurs, because the challenges they face today are not abstract. They are structural, compounding, and increasingly shaped by federal policy decisions.

Black and other minority entrepreneurs are more likely to start businesses, yet less likely to access affordable capital, professional support, or growth-stage opportunities. Even profitable firms are denied financing at higher rates, and when support does exist, it is often short-term, fragmented, or disconnected from the places where entrepreneurs actually operate.

At the same time, these longstanding barriers are colliding with new pressures. Tariffs and supply chain disruptions have raised the cost of goods and materials. Inclusive procurement pathways are narrowing as agencies and institutions pull back amid legal and political uncertainty. Immigration enforcement actions, even when not targeted at a specific business, are destabilizing local labor markets and reducing foot traffic in entire neighborhoods. Fear alone has economic consequences.

For Black-owned businesses, which are more likely to operate with thinner margins and less access to flexible credit, these pressures don't just slow growth. They force businesses to freeze hiring, reduce hours, delay expansion, or exit the market altogether. This is not anecdotal. It is a predictable pattern we are seeing across sectors.

That is why the SPARK Act is so important, and why its timing matters.

What distinguishes Senator Markey's SPARK Act is that it does not treat entrepreneurs as isolated actors who simply need more advice or resilience. It recognizes that successful businesses grow within strong local ecosystems, and that those ecosystems require sustained investment.

The SPARK Act invests in incubators, accelerators, and community-based lenders that provide trusted, on-the-ground support in underserved communities. Just as importantly, it pairs technical assistance with flexible financing that reduces collateral barriers and steers entrepreneurs away from predatory alternatives. This combination is critical.

From our experience at BECMA, this integrated approach is what actually changes outcomes. When entrepreneurs receive coordinated support, business advising, access to capital, and

pathways into procurement and job creation, businesses last longer, hire locally, and create wealth that circulates within their communities.

The SPARK Act also gets accountability right. By requiring reporting on capital access, job creation, wages, and participation by race and geography, it ensures that public dollars are tied to real economic outcomes, not just activity. At a moment when data transparency is eroding, this commitment matters.

In Massachusetts, we have seen how fragile progress becomes when ecosystem funding is short-term or disconnected from local realities. The SPARK Act offers a durable national framework that scales what works while allowing communities to tailor solutions to their unique challenges.

Senator Markey's leadership on this legislation sends a clear message: minority entrepreneurs are not a niche concern. They are central to America's economic resilience. When Black and other underserved entrepreneurs succeed, families stabilize, jobs are created, and regional economies grow stronger.

On behalf of BECMA and the entrepreneurs and workers we represent, I urge this Committee to advance the SPARK Act and continue investing in policies that make entrepreneurship a viable pathway to stability, growth, and shared prosperity.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to your questions.

Nicole Obi
President & CEO