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TESTIMONY: DAN PROULX, JR.

Chair Cantwell, Ranking Member Risch, Senator Shaheen and members of the Small Business Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I speak to you today as a proud Marine veteran who, following my discharge in 1994, experienced the same types of challenges finding quality post-service employment being faced by many veterans today. I explored several paths in those years, some more promising than others, fortunately culminating with earning a master electrician's license followed by my general contractor's license.

Today, the construction firm I founded in 2008 along with three employees, Monument Construction, directly employs up to 44 professionals seasonally, in addition to providing many more quality jobs for our subcontractors. We're headquartered around the corner from Senator Shaheen's office in Nashua, New Hampshire, and perform work throughout the country, primarily for federal agencies and particularly the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Monument Construction is a verified Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned and certified HUBZone Small Business delivering complete construction services including new construction and renovation, plus full-service electrical, mechanical, plumbing, carpentry, site work, concrete and project management. Our work includes over 70 federal projects, both design-build and bid-build, and frequently with a focus on environmental sustainability components. Our federal customers have been the Department of Homeland Security, Department of Veterans Affairs, US Department of the Navy, US Army, US Army Corps of Engineers, USDA Forestry Service, National Guard, and the US Coast Guard.

The firm in 2012 celebrated delivery of our largest project to date, the \$6.5 million psychiatric and polytrauma facility at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in White River Junction, Vermont; and was also awarded our largest project to-date, a \$7.8 million exterior renovation at the Department of Veterans Affairs in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. While some found Monument's initial growth predictions wildly optimistic in 2008, with support from our team, quality subcontractors, customers, and agencies such as the New Hampshire Procurement Technical Assistance Program (NH-PTAP) and the Small Business Association (SBA), Monument exceeded those initial goals.

But, back at the beginning, Monument Construction's first project was a small one with the Department of Veterans Affairs in Togus, Maine. It resulted after we constantly pestered many of New England's federal contracting officers, when one took a leap of faith to give us a chance to succeed on this tiny \$22,000 ventilation project.



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Our success would not have been possible without the help of NH-PTAP and SBA. In fact, we wouldn't have gotten off the ground without the expert advice of their advisors, or without their financing programs. Our PTAP and SBA consultants guided us through the thicket of acronyms, paperwork and registrations that enabled us to appear on contracting officers' radar in the first place: such as obtaining a CAGE code, registering for ORCA, and signing up for a DUNS number.

We rented 1,000 square feet of space, with an opportunity to purchase our entire building down the road. SBA connected us with a bank familiar with the Patriot Express loan program, which from then until now has provided us the liquidity to grow, and our Patriot Express loans have grown with us. At the start, without any past performance to demonstrate, with no track record, obtaining conventional financing was an impossibility. As you can imagine, I believe Senator Shaheen's Veterans Entrepreneurship Act, which among other things making SBA loan fee waivers permanent, deserves speedy passage.

Our experience with federal contracting officers has been overwhelmingly favorable, in that once we began to establish our track record of reliable past performance, they became willing to entrust us with gradually larger projects.

Our next major step forward came in 2009, when the Department of Veterans Affairs in New England awarded us a coveted spot on a five-year multiple-award construction contract, known as a MATOC. This MATOC award boosted us in two ways: first, we were awarded five of the MATOC's initial seed projects, providing critical cash flow for a new business; second, and more importantly for the long term, receiving the MATOC award let other contracting officers know that Monument Construction had passed an unusually rigorous vetting. Since that initial MATOC award, Monument has been awarded an additional fourteen MATOC contracts from Albuquerque to Maine.

That year, 2009, our first full year in business, saw about \$290,000 in revenue. This year we anticipate about \$12 million in revenue.

This year saw another milestone for our firm, when we completed renovations on our building. The same building that housed our initial modest 1,000 square feet of rental space has grown into 5,000 square feet of high-quality office space, plus another 4,000 thousand square feet for tenants. Once again, the SBA played a role, supporting our renovation with a 504 loan.

Finally, even as I testify here, we're finalizing an SBA CAPline 7(a) loan to fuel our ongoing growth.

I'm happy to testify today in the spirit of sharing our road to success, in the hope that some of what worked for us will help other veteran entrepreneurs to succeed. In addition to my own post-service employment challenges, I've



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witnessed other veterans encountering difficulty in jump-starting their post-service careers while serving on the board of directors of Harbor Homes, a local veterans housing organization.

In addition to employing veterans and veteran-owned subcontractors when possible, my door has always been open to mentor local veterans to encourage them onto the road to success. We've even hired another service-disabled veteran-owned construction firm, technically a competitor, when they encountered a temporary problem with their CVE certification.

All of us at Monument Construction are grateful for the programs that helped us to succeed, from SBA and PTAP, to veterans-only contracting set-asides, and we fully support your efforts to enhance and strengthen these programs so that other veterans may also find success.

I thank you today for focusing on this important issue and hope to assist your work however possible.



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