

**Realizing the Vision of Parren Mitchell – Untapping the  
Potential of Minority and Women Contracting**



**Testimony of**

**Euripides “Ruby” Rubio  
President & CEO, OTA**

**to the**

**Committee on Small Business & Entrepreneurship  
United States Senate**

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President & CEO  
Ops Tech Alliance (OTA)

Good morning Chairman Cardin, Ranking Member Paul, and Distinguished Members of the Committee. My name is Euripides Rubio, and I am the President & CEO of Ops Tech Alliance (“OTA”) – a 100% Hispanic and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned business located in Bowie, Maryland. As a Minority and an advocate for service-disabled veterans in business, thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the discussion of how we can best tap the incredible potential of our country’s minority and women contractors.

### **Ops Tech Alliance background**

Ops Tech Alliance (OTA), a Maryland based company, is a certified SBA 8(a) Small Disadvantaged Business (SDB) and Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business (SDVOSB) founded by a former Intelligence and Special Operations professional. The company was formed with a single focus: to bridge the gap between operations and cyber technology in the United States’ Government Department of Defense (DoD), Intelligence Community (IC), and Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA). We provide mission-focused training, specialized cybersecurity products, and support services to those government elements that require experienced operators to support their mission.

OTA achieved a position on the Inc. 5000 list of the fastest-growing private companies in America for three years in a row in 2018, 2019, and 2020. We also made the 2021 Inc. 5000 DC Metro area list. The company staff has over 75 years of combined operational experience. We are currently executing contracts providing professional services, cybersecurity products, and training support to various National Security elements in the US Government.

With the increasing cyber threats to our nation, our backgrounds and operational experience allow us to consistently produce superior operating results and provide an increased level of support to our clients.

### **The beginnings**

I grew up in an underprivileged environment, but with a strong mother who got us out of the projects and kept us on track. She taught me to be tough and constantly encouraged me to learn and do well in school, which led me to the Pre-Med program at the University of Puerto Rico. Due to financial constraints, I had to drop out. I moved with my mother and younger sister to Florida, where I decided to join the Army. I was that guy who couldn’t wait to jump out of planes for the \$50 dollars a month the recruiter offered me. But I ended up doing a lot more than jumping out of planes—I stayed in the Army for 23 years with a career in Intelligence and Special Operations.

After my retirement, I worked for a couple of companies in contracts supporting national security missions. This was the perfect fit for me. I had found a way to continue serving my country as a civilian. These roles gave me insight into what the next phase of my life could be, and the answer was in entrepreneurship. After 23 years of action in the military, I was itching to do something that got my adrenaline going again, something daunting and challenging. Starting a new business was just what the doctor ordered. I started researching SBA resources online,

went to my local SBA rep, and, in 2012, registered OTA in Maryland. A year later, I invested all of my retirement savings into OTA and took the daunting, challenging leap of faith. The timing was unfortunate, though, and not long after (in 2013) the US Government entered a Shutdown. To be honest, looking back, I faced many bloodcurdling situations in my previous military career, but this was scarier than any of them. I was in the initial stages of operating a small business that I had already invested my savings into. Statistically, I was already expected to fail. But now, absent the possibility of government contracts - I was alone and vulnerable. Even banks were not a viable option; I was a risk to them, and I knew it. I was terrified, but more motivated than ever before. I considered my life—how I grew up and the challenges I was exposed to as a minority—and knew I would not allow for defeat.

## **Financial reality**

By 2014, I was on more stable ground. I had acquired enough money from friends and family to hire OTA's first employee. This was a big step for me. Now I had people—in this case a friend and his family—for whom I was responsible. In this same year, we got into our first service subcontract, which added three more employees. So, by the end of 2014, I was responsible for four families, not to mention my own. That motivated me to work even harder. This was a significant year for OTA in terms of initial growth. But with that growth, the need for cash became more critical. One of the biggest hurdles I faced was delayed payments by large prime businesses. In other words, I was not going to receive payment for my services until at least 45 to 60 days after I submitted my invoices. Of course, my employees could not wait 45 to 60 days to be paid, nor could my bills or overhead. It was a frustrating situation—even when we had good contracts, we struggled for cash. To this day, I know this is an issue small businesses struggle with. The current law doesn't enforce the monitoring to ensure small businesses are receiving prompt payment within 15 days, thereby giving fledgling small businesses more breathing room. It is essential for the continued growth of small businesses that large prime businesses be required to pay for services rendered within 15 days. Paying faster would not be a burden on larger businesses, considering they are more likely to receive payments from the government and to have larger lines of credit. But it would make a world of difference for small businesses.

During the process of growing the company, I made mistakes, but also learned a lot of lessons. One of those lessons was how important it is to have a good relationship with a financial institution. Through my network, I was introduced to a bank that eventually provided us with an SBA 7(a) loan and established a line of credit. This was a big life saver, but honestly I had no idea these loans were available until the bank brought it up. At this stage of growing the company, I had less time to do research and attend business training. I was unsure of what resources were available to me and of how to find them. There was so much that required my focus inside the company—creating and implementing processes, rules, and policies, performing HR functions, maintaining accurate and compliant financials, etc.—that it would have been impossible to focus equally on what I needed to know outside of the company. This is an issue that many other business owners face as their companies start to grow. Simply put: these small business owners don't know what they don't know. Increased awareness and training on how to take advantage of government resources should be available to them.

## **Competitive Landscape**

The Federal Contracting space is a highly competitive market and is currently hampered by limited budgets, inadequate opportunities for minority small businesses and frequent contract award protests, which is becoming a norm and needs to be addressed.

As we searched for opportunities, I found it more difficult to penetrate the federal contracting market as a small business, so in 2015, I decided to apply for the 8(a) program. We were approved for the program, but I found that the reality was not what I expected. Our current clients were not familiar with the 8(a) program, so they hesitated to use it. There was lack of awareness, training, and resolve for the government to use the 8(a), at least in my line of work, so I ended up in the same position where I started.

## **Small Business Resources**

We needed resources for mentorship, training, office space, and collaboration with similar companies, so we started searching for some sort of business incubator. That's how we connected with Lisa Smith at the Bowie Business Innovation Center (Bowie BIC) in 2017. They provided us with all of the above plus the Bowie BIC 8(a)-accelerator program, which brought not only training and mentoring, but people we could talk to and ask questions about how to use the program more efficiently. I regret receiving my 8(a) certification prior to this training, because their resources opened my eyes to areas and functions I should have been paying attention to from the beginning. Therefore, time and money were wasted during those years.

In the same year, we were accepted to the Veteran Institute for Procurement (VIP) growth program. This was another great program, managed by Barbara Ashe, where we had very valuable training and networking with other veteran-owned companies as well as government contacts.

Without question, these two programs gave us a lot of insight into areas of our business and client landscape that I couldn't find anywhere else. I strongly believe that the government should make it a requirement for small businesses to receive such training, even before they receive certifications like an 8(a), SDVOSB, or others. I believe this will increase the success of small businesses but also increase the confidence of US government clients so that small businesses will be better prepared to execute their contracts. Both sides win.

## **In conclusion**

We are a small company, but not afraid of the challenge. As a small business we have a lot more flexibility, cost efficiency, and innovation than a large business. As a minority- and veteran-owned small business, we have more grit, savvy, and experience overcoming obstacles than a large business. However, the competitive landscape for minority small businesses is extremely volatile. And of course, I am not even addressing the devastating effects that COVID-19 had on small business and financial resources. If it weren't for PPP, I would not be sitting here talking to you as an operating company.

I believe these are some key steps that, if implemented by the committee, would have the largest impact on minority small businesses:

- Increase and enforce the contracting goals of the federal government and large prime contractors for small businesses, 8(a) firms, SDVOSBs, WOSBs, and HUBZone companies.
- Increase training for Contracting Officers on the actual process for utilizing resources like 8(a), SDVOSB, WOSB, etc.
- Expand access and require minority businesses to graduate from programs like the Bowie BIC 8(a) accelerator and VIP.
- Establish monitoring to ensure that federal agencies and especially large prime contractors promptly pay minority small businesses within 15 days.
- Change the protest process. Protests are devastating the procurement system and wasting money and opportunities for minority small businesses.

Thank you, Distinguished Members of the Committee, for your time and attention to these issues. Minorities and women are clearly in the spotlight now and I recommend focus on these matters more than ever. I am honored to be here to speak on their behalf. I am ready for any questions you may have.