



Testimony for the Record

Submitted to the U.S. Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship

For the Hearing: "American Entrepreneurship for 250 Years: Driving Innovation, Growth and Opportunity"

April 29, 2026

Liz G. Sweet

MIRA Coalition

69 Canal Street, 3rd floor

Boston MA 02114

Dear Chair Ernst, Ranking Member Markey, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for inviting me to participate in today's hearing. My name is Liz Sweet and I am the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition, based in Boston Massachusetts. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony regarding the critical contributions immigrants have made to small business growth throughout our nation's history.

The Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy (MIRA) Coalition is the largest coalition in New England advocating for the rights and integration of immigrants and refugees, who number over one million in Massachusetts. Our coalition includes over 160 member organizations, including community groups, community health centers, legal service providers, refugee resettlement agencies, and a host of other organizations that provide direct services to immigrants and refugees. MIRA Coalition's mission is to convene, serve, and organize together with our members, community leaders, and allies for the advancement of all immigrants across the Commonwealth and beyond.

Our coalition focuses on advancing immigrant inclusion, especially economic inclusion. Throughout our history, immigrants have contributed to our prosperity and economic growth, in Massachusetts and nationally. Too often, new immigrants face barriers to full economic inclusion, which often drives them towards greater creativity and adaptation in founding small businesses to create their own opportunities. In one recent analysis by MassBudget, the Immigration Research Initiative, and the Economic Policy Institute, they found that immigrants generate some \$130 billion of output annually for the Massachusetts economy.¹ Currently in Massachusetts, 28% of business owners are immigrants, which is higher than the national average of 21%.² Foreign-born workers make up one-fifth of our workforce in Massachusetts.

¹ Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, New Census Migration Data for 2023 – Modest Domestic Outmigration Offset by Larger International Inflow.

² WBUR, Report: Immigrants contribute more than \$100 billion annually to Greater Boston economy.



And, more than 91,000 immigrant entrepreneurs generate more than \$3 billion in business income.³ In Greater Boston, immigrants own 40% of our "Main Street" businesses, including more than half of all restaurants, 61% of nail salons, and 86% of convenience stores.⁴ These small businesses power our main streets, attracting people and resources to our cities and towns.

Massachusetts has long had a powerful draw on newcomers to America. The earliest English colonists came here, followed by the Irish escaping famine, who helped transform Boston into an industrial city. The industrial wave brought large numbers of Italian, Russian, and Polish immigrants. And then from the 1960s to the 1990s, Massachusetts was one of seven states that as a group attracted between 60 to 75 percent of all the immigrants arriving in the United States each year.⁵ These more recent waves of immigration have brought people from Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Africa. And within each of these waves, immigrants have set up businesses and contributed to our economic competitiveness.

Throughout our history, immigrants to Massachusetts have identified opportunities and opened key businesses. For example, during the times of the whaling industry in southern Massachusetts, large numbers of Cape Verdeans worked as whaling crew members and settled in New Bedford, in southern Massachusetts. As whaling declined, enterprising Cape Verdeans bought up old whaling vessels, and refitted them to become "packet ships." Between 1860 and 1965, 41% of the packets trading between New England and the Cape Verde Islands were owned by Cape Verdeans, contributing to our trade and growth.

More recently, Max and Morris Feldberg immigrated to Massachusetts, fleeing Tsarist Russia in the early 20th century. After settling in Chelsea, Massachusetts, they opened their first retail store, which then grew to hundreds of stores by Max's death in 1988. That is now the company we know as TJX Companies, the Framingham-based Fortune 500 firm that owns TJ Maxx, HomeGoods, and Marshalls. And 58% of the Fortune 500 firms based in Massachusetts were founded by at least one immigrant or child of immigrants—Staples, Moderna, General Electric, Thermo Fisher Scientific, Biogen, Wayfair, and Boston Scientific.⁶

And today in Massachusetts, we are home to a robust life sciences ecosystem, and a globally innovative healthcare and biotechnology sector. This sector is also powered by immigrants, who

³ American Immigration Council, Immigrants in Massachusetts, <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/massachusetts/>, accessed April 27, 2026

⁴ Global Greater Boston: Immigrants in a Changing Region (February 14, 2024) https://www.bostonindicators.org/global_boston

⁵ New American Economy, The Contributions of New Americans in Massachusetts, August 2016.

⁶ "Nearly Half of Fortune 500 Companies in 2025 Were Founded by Immigrants or Their Children." American Immigration Council, <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/report/fortune-500-companies-founded-by-immigrants-2025/>. Accessed 1 Mar. 2026.



account for 29.3% of STEM workers.⁷ Our research hospitals and biotech firms depend on new immigrant labor and innovation.

Businesses founded and operated by immigrants not only drive our shared prosperity, but ensure that we remain competitive in our changing global economy. Immigrants bring creativity, adaptation, new ideas and innovation. Immigrant owned businesses add to our culture, bringing new flavors, new products and new perspectives that enrich us all.

This is our American story, that waves of newcomers have arrived here, identified gaps and opportunities, and have built new businesses to continue to grow our country into the powerhouse that we are globally. Immigrant entrepreneurship is nothing new for Massachusetts or this country, but it is an engine upon which we all rely and benefit, and we must ensure that our country continues to be a place where entrepreneurs continue to flourish.

⁷ American Immigration Council: Immigrants in Massachusetts
<https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/massachusetts/#>