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Senator Shaheen and committee members, thank you for inviting me to testify today. It is an honor to provide testimony on veteran entrepreneurship and the Small Business Administration's role in assisting veteran small business owners.

I am a retired Air Force officer and the owner and creator of Lickee's & Chewy's Candies & Creamery in Dover, NH. It is a 5000sf candy, ice cream and chocolate shop that hosts an average of 40,000 guests per year, employs 20 people (6 full time) and we are currently expanding into an additional 5000sf of space to build a chocolate factory and warehouse. None of this would have been possible without the support of the SBA, the Small Business Development Center and the programs that support veteran small business owners such as the Boots to Business program.

My journey began shortly after I retired from the Air Force in 2014 when a small candy shop in the town I lived in came up for sale. Seeing as I love candy and because I had always wanted to work for myself, I decided to meet with the current owner, just to see if there was any reason not to buy it. It was an easy choice, and in late 2014 I took ownership of the small 500sf shop. At the time, I was also working full time as a GS-13 at Hanscom Air Force Base so my wife ran the shop during the day and at night I would come in and make chocolates, order products, and put out new displays. Long story short, our sales grew and grew and in Sept 2016 I left my government job to go "full time candy" with grand plans to build a newer much larger store. My plan was to expand and build a new 5000sf shop that would become a destination. Thankfully, I was working with an advisor from the New Hampshire SBA Small Business Development Center and we worked for months on the business plan, funding options and business design. He helped to match me with banks in the area to apply for and secure SBA loans to provide the capital necessary to get things going. I needed to borrow about \$250,000 for construction expenses, equipment purchases and inventory.

Granted, the \$250K was a best guess estimate and as you can imagine there are often several unexpected expenses that come up during the early stages of starting and/or growing a business. Our actual start-up/build out costs ended up closer to \$350K, which we paid for with our own cash and credit. The extra expenses included construction costs, higher equipment costs, and several other items including loan fees. It can be frustrating and a challenge to pay fees and expenses for items that do not directly result in creating profits for a small business. It is one thing to pay for tangible items such as new equipment or construction that can

directly result in increased business or at least in creating smoother business operating conditions but fees tend to deplete starting capital and put a new business “further behind the eight ball” or further in the hole before they have even opened their doors. Thankfully, our business took off and we were able to pay back our loans and continue to grow. As a matter of fact, we also borrowed another \$55k a couple years ago to purchase more equipment using an SBA Express loan where thankfully the fee was waived because cashflow was tight at that time due to the COVID pandemic.

The frequent and multiple unplanned expenses when starting or growing a business can be high and create barriers to starting a business or even create a financial hardship under which a new business will not succeed and in the event that is a veteran with 4, 6 or 10 years of service who is relying on their new business to be successful in order to make ends meet then they will need all the help they can get. It is legislation such as the Heroes Business Opportunity Act waiving the SBA Guaranty Fee for loans made to veteran that creates another tool making it easier for veteran owned businesses to access capital and will “quietly” but powerfully help veteran owned small businesses succeed.