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# DAVE HEATON

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 85<sup>TH</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

## **Testimony of Representative Dave Heaton on AB 759** **Assembly Committee on Jobs and the Economy** *Thursday February 4, 2016*

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, thank you for holding this public hearing today and for giving me an opportunity to speak to you in support of Assembly Bill (AB) 759. I want to thank Senator Petrowski and his staff for their work on this legislation.

AB 759 will provide a \$100,000 grant in both fiscal year 2015-16 and fiscal year 2016-2017 (\$200,000 total for biennium) to the Marathon County Economic Development Corporation (MCDEVCO) for the purposes of creating a revolving loan fund for minority-owned businesses in Marathon County. Under this bill, “minority-owned” means a business that is at least 30% owned by someone who is a minority.

Marathon County is critical to the economy of Northcentral Wisconsin and the state of Wisconsin as a whole. Economic growth in Marathon County will contribute significantly to the overall fiscal health of Wisconsin. An important factor in Marathon County’s economy, and in particular Wausau, is a growing minority population. Wausau has one of the largest Hmong populations in the state and this population continues to grow. Marathon County also has a growing Latino and African American population. With this diverse population, Marathon County is home to many minority owned businesses. However, one of the major impediments to the growth of these business is the lack of access to low cost capital. AB 759 would help overcome this obstacle by starting the revolving loan fund for these types of businesses through MCDEVCO.

Assisting small business growth in Marathon County will not only spur economic growth in Marathon County, but throughout Northcentral Wisconsin, providing returns to the State in the form of increased revenue. The grant provided by AB 759 is a great next step to all of the progress that has been made on economic and workforce development in Northcentral Wisconsin over the past few years. A stronger economy in this area of the state will strengthen the economy of the state of Wisconsin as a whole. Mr. Chairman and committee members, I ask for your support of AB 759, and thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.

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February 4, 2016

RE: Testify on AB 759, the Revolving Loan Program for Minority Owned  
Businesses

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Chairman Neylon, it is so good to be with you and thank you for holding this public hearing. I am delighted to be here and want to thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of AB 759 that was proposed by Representative Dave Heaton and Senator Petrowski who represents Marathon County.

My name is Blong Moua, an individual with connections to the Hmong and Laotian community and businesses in the Wausau and Schofield areas. In addition, I was also a former Employment Counselor in the Marathon County Job Center for more than 18 years and had one of the highest job placement of Wisconsin W-2 clients in Marathon County from 1994-2008.

I want to take a quick moment to thank Representative Dave Heaton, and other representatives or Senators who have worked closely with our Hmong community in Wausau and other areas around the state of Wisconsin for your hard work and leadership on this committee and in the Wisconsin state capital.

I am here today to ask for your help in support of bill 759. The passing of this bill will be a huge support for future minority owned businesses like those in the Wausau area who are struggling with financial support and technical assistance to continue their operations. I am sure that the revolving loan program will help minority-owned businesses create jobs that would fuel families and members of the Wausau community to assist in reducing government dependency.

All Representatives and committee members, we the Hmong people have been here in this country for 40 years already. Refugees are our history, business opportunities are our future, but in the Government business field house, the metaphor of the level playing field comes to mind. That metaphor; however, doesn't quite describe the circumstances for minority owned businesses, especially the Hmong community.

Far from being on the playing field, many of our minority businesses and business owners like myself and others find ourselves standing outside doors where the business games in America are being conducted. We are trying to raise our voices but we have no speaker to make our voice louder. So today, I am here to knock at your door and ask for your help and support of AB 759 that will assist us in our playing level within the American game of business. In addition, we all dream of the American dream, the passing of this bill will help minority business owners step closer towards achieving that dream.

Further, I am here to signal with one voice as loud as I can and say, "we are here." "Look at us." "Recognize us." "Acknowledge us." We are here and we want to participate in the American economy too.

The honorable Scott Walker, Governor of the State of Wisconsin, Mr. Chair or Madam Chair and committee members, I am here to tell you that in Wausau, there are many of Hmong businesses existing without government support such as:

- \* Quality Times, Inc
- \* Wausau Computer
- \* Rising Star Financial Services, Inc
- \* Shopper's Choice, LLC
- \* Supper Wash Laundromat
- \* Kohl man's & Lee
- \* Sewing Express, Inc
- \* Schofield Oriental Market
- \* EZ Wireless LLC
- \* Latricia's Financial Service
- \* Quality Home Care
- \* Health First, LLC
- \* Sun Financial Services, Inc
- \* S M Travel Services, LLC
- \* Services Solution, LLC
- \* Wausau World Market
- \* Mekong Fresh Meat Corp
- \* AP International, Inc
- \* B & P Sewing
- \* L. Jay Inc
- \* Wausau Oriental Food
- \* Candid Memories LLC
- \* Elderly Sanctuary Care
- \* Compassion Elderly Care
- \* Supper International Food
- \* and many others as well

Many of the business owners in Marathon County can't be here. Their voices won't be heard today, but I am here to speak on behalf of them. The businesses I just mentioned have been in existence for over 10 plus years. These businesses are still operating as they did when they first opened and can't expand to reach their maximum potential due to the lack of government support and any revolving loan program for the purpose of funding minority owned businesses. Can you imagine the impact that these businesses can have to the community if such revolving loan program such as the one proposed in AB 759 existed? There would be positive

economic growth and potential, not only in the county of Marathon, but in the state of Wisconsin as well.

All Representatives and members of the Wisconsin Assembly, we are also taxpayers, citizens of this state, veterans of the Vietnam War, and of this nation. Why are we out of the process and without any help to fund and support us?

The Honorable Governor Scott Walker, Mr Chair or Madam Chair, including all Senators, Representatives of the State of Wisconsin, I believe that all of you will join me in this room today to make a clear decision in support of the bill 759 because today, we need financial support and resources to help minority businesses grow, particularly in today's tough economic climate.

The Hmong community, especially, our 40 years refugee's mission has passed. We now are permanent Hmong American. We need to strengthen ourselves and our community in the American economic dream. So, I say the time is now. There is no better time than now. Now is the time to bring the Minority Business Development to the forefront in the State of Wisconsin, particularly Wausau area Hmong Business Development. And, I am sure that my testimony at today's hearing will concur that this bill will truly be impactful to the minority population and the population at large in a positive way. I am also sure that each one of you have felt, in your own way, the desire to turn things around and to regain our economic footing for the people in our local communities.

To that end, I again ask for your support of bill 759, the revolving loan program for minority owned businesses. If adopted, this bill will establish a Minority Business Development Program to assist qualified minority businesses in the Wausau area, Marathon County, and the state of Wisconsin by providing technical assistance, loan guarantees, and other business related assistance.

Again, I thank you for inviting me here and giving me this opportunity to address the needs of revolving loan programs for the purpose of funding minority owned businesses to every important community within the Wisconsin state legislature. I am available for any questions if you have any.

Thank you and May God Bless you all.

Blong Moua

On behalf of Wausau areas Minorities Business Development 2016