

MWBE Firms, State Legislators, and Partners Come Together Albany to Raise Awareness on Key Issues and Legislation

*Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte, State Senator James Sanders, Jr.,
Assemblymember Crystal Peoples-Stokes, and B. Seth Bryant of Bryant Rabbino
LLP host successful lobby day in Albany*

Albany, NY – This year marks a significant year for **Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBEs)** in that we will be learning about the results of both the City and State Disparity Studies. Many MWBEs know qualitatively that disparities still exist as evidenced by support of existing legislation that strives to strengthen previously hard fought gains to increase utilization goals and increase opportunities for MWBEs.

Today, **Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte, State Senator James Sanders, Jr., Assemblymember Crystal Peoples-Stokes, and B. Seth Bryant of Bryant Rabbino LLP** were joined by MWBE firms, their colleagues, and allies for an MWBE Coalition Lobby Day. The day was spent with MWBE firms visiting with State legislators to raise the visibility around key issues and legislation concerning the MWBE community.

Many of those issues have to do with continuing to widen opportunities for MWBE participation and utilization, as well as making the process more transparent and demanding more accountability, and building the capacity of MWBEs to become sustainable and move from being sub-prime to prime contractors. Lastly, this legislation has sought to remove barriers by lifting the personal net worth, which will allow businesses to grow, and making it easier to gain access to capital.

"The MWBE program has opened up many doors for minority and women owned businesses in New York, in addition to creating incredible opportunities for the State and City of New York," said **Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie**. "Moving ahead, we look forward to finding ways to improve the program. The success of New York depends upon our ability to level the playing field for every hard working entrepreneur across the state."

Senate Democratic Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins said, "Investing in MWBEs helps ensure that more New York entrepreneurs are able to unleash their full potential. I commend Senate Democratic MWBE Task Force Chair, Senator James Sanders and Assembly Subcommittee on MWBEs Chair, Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte for their leadership on this important issue. New York must take a leadership role in empowering MBWEs, and my colleagues and I will make sure that opportunities grow for New York State's diverse entrepreneurs."

"Today was a momentous day for MWBEs throughout New York State," said **Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte, Chair of the Subcommittee on the Oversight of Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises**. We had a cross section of MWBE firms, State Legislators, and State and City agencies advocating for an increase in participation, transparency, capacity and capital access. I look forward to making this even bigger and better next year."

"History was made this week," said **Senator James Sanders, Jr.** "For the first time the MWBE community came forth to consciously and solely lobby for justice in Albany. I want to thank my colleagues in government for standing up for an even playing field for all communities. I also want to thank **Seth Bryant** and all other MWBE firms who participated. Our voices have been heard in Albany. Let us come back next year in larger numbers. The struggle for justice has been long but we will get to the mountain top. We call on those in government to get the message and let us get on the bus toward freedom."

"We have made some inroads since the MWBE program was instated and we continue to push forward to address the institutional barriers experienced by MWBEs." said **Assemblymember People-Stokes, Chair of the Government Operations Committee.** "It was very inspiring to see an organized effort take root. I have every confidence that this Coalition will only get stronger over time."

"On this MWBE Lobby, advocates came together to seek to have the State-wide MWBE program goals as set forth in Article 15-A of the Executive Law expanded to all projects using State funds, grants or incentives, including projects by municipalities and counties, and to give the State's municipalities, from New York City to Buffalo, the same powers that New York State Authorities have to develop and expand business with MWBEs," said **B. Seth Bryant, Managing Partner of Bryant Rabbino LLP, a New York City based law firm, which is certified as a MBE.** "New York's commitment to MWBE business is the strongest in the nation. Still, participation and utilization at the local levels needs to be highlighted and improved to ensure that all qualified businesses have an opportunity to participate and actually are utilized in the economy of this great State. The MWBE Coalition applauds our legislators and the Governor for their support of this issue that empowers minorities, women and service disabled veterans and thereby strengthens our State."

"When the middle class was built in this country, minorities and women were often excluded from most economic opportunities," said **State Senator Marisol Alcantara.** "The wealth gap, the income gap, and other forms of inequality persist to this day. As an Afro-Latina, I think it's important that the City of New York send a clear message that minority and women-owned businesses, which make up more than 50% of the businesses in this city, will be considered for city contracts. This is why I am the prime sponsor of [S6513](#), which both creates a mentoring program for MWBE's that would increase the number of certified businesses and raises the cap on awards to MWBE's to \$200,000 to match the State of New York, greatly strengthening this program."

Assemblyman Fred W. Thiele, Jr. said, "I would like to extend a welcome to all of those who took time out of their busy schedules to travel to Albany to attend the MWBE Coalition Day. As Chair of the Assembly Small Business Committee, I will continue to advocate for the advancement of legislation that creates greater opportunities for MWBEs in New York State."

"Unfortunately the history of access to economic opportunities for women and minorities in this country has an abysmal track record," said **Assemblymember Victor Pichardo.** "The MWBE efforts thus far have offered more opportunities for economic fairness and further eliminated

barriers to success, improving conditions in our Bronx neighborhoods, as well as ensuring women have a seat at the table and I'll keep fighting to ensure there is a level playing field for all New Yorkers."

"Helping minority- and women-owned businesses take an active part in our economy helps communities all over New York thrive," said **Assemblymember Pamela Hunter**. "By offering women and minorities more supportive services, we can open doors for new economic growth across our state. It's up to us to bridge the gaps that exist so more minority- and women-owned businesses can succeed."

"Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises are creating jobs, opportunities and hope in our communities. Strengthening our Minority and Women-Owned businesses is the key to empowering neighborhoods like the South Bronx and neighborhoods across the state," said **Assemblymember Michael Blake**. "On MWBE Coalition Lobby Day 2017, I commend the remarkable leadership of **Speaker Heastie, Assembly Members Bichotte and Peoples-Stokes, Senator Sanders, Jr. and Seth Bryant** for continuing to create awareness, legislation and opportunities for MWBEs across the state. Government must stand as an ally with MWBE's and removes ceilings to their growth. From continuing to push forward with implementation of successful programs to enforcing our passed legislation of paying out contracts in 15 days to ensuring Mentor Protégé Programs, discretionary procurement processes, assessing best value instead of just lowest bid, we are creating an environment that is supportive of our MWBEs. Every day must be a day to support our MWBEs, and, we will continue to fight for them to have access to contracts, capital and economic opportunities to continue **#BuidingABetterBronx** and stronger empire state."

"I am proud that the Assembly continues to be the champion of Minority and Women Owned Business Enterprises (MWBEs). There are several driving goals as we craft legislation to promote Minority and Women Business Enterprises. We must level the playing field, eliminate disparities and create economic opportunity", stated **Assembly member Rebecca A. Seawright**. "Once we achieve these goals, we will see the continued growth and increased economic vitality of our MWBE community."