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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS & ENTREPRENEURSHIP
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6350

October 17, 2007

The Honorable Steven C. Preston
Administrator
U.S. Small Business Administration
409 Third Street, S.W.
Washington, DC 20416

Dear Administrator Preston:

As Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, we would like to express our deep concerns about the long delayed implementation of the Women's Contracting Set-Aside Program. The Small Business Administration (SBA) recently released Fiscal Year 2006 small business "goaling" results that continue to illustrate just how far the government is from reaching its women-owned and agency-wide small business goals. Women-owned small businesses only achieved 3.4 percent of the 5 percent statutory goal.

The women's set-aside program enacted in December 2000 authorized, on a discretionary basis, contracting officers to "set-aside" competition for federal contracts to women-owned small businesses. The program required SBA to conduct a study determining which industries would be characterized as under-represented. The study was finally completed and made available to the public in April of this year. Regrettably, nearly seven years after enactment, women-owned small businesses are still waiting for the program to be implemented.

During a Committee hearing on July 18th, the SBA pledged to implement the women set-aside program by the "end of this fiscal year." Also, in a September 20th hearing on expanding federal contracting opportunities for women business owners we strongly urged you to follow through on your earlier commitment to implement the program by the end of the fiscal year. The end of Fiscal Year 2007 has come and gone and the program has not been implemented, as promised. We hope that you would agree that women-owned small businesses have waited long enough.

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of your immediate attention to this vital issue. Please provide a response with a specific timeline for implementation of the women's contracting set-aside program within 10 working days of receipt of this letter.

If you have any questions or need any additional information, please do not hesitate to call Mr. Gregory Willis (Senator Kerry) or Mr. Erik Necciai (Senator Snowe) at 202-224-5175.

Sincerely,


JOHN F. KERRY
Chairman


OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
Ranking Member