

Thank you, Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Braun, and the committee for allowing me to testify today.

My name is Jeffrey Mittman, and I am the president & CEO of Bosma Enterprises in Indianapolis, IN. Bosma is a nonprofit social enterprise that is the largest employer of Hoosiers who are blind and the sole comprehensive provider of blind rehabilitation services in Indiana. Bosma employs nearly 200 people, and over half are blind. We have employees who are blind at all levels of our company.

In 2005, I served in the US Army deployed to Iraq. While in a convoy with some of my Iraqi counterparts, an IED exploded. I was critically injured, and I lost my eyesight. After years of recovery, I eventually returned to work. I restarted my career at the National Industries for the Blind. Here, I was introduced to the AbilityOne Program and the employment it provides to nearly 40,000 Americans with disabilities. After NIB, I began to work at the Defense Finance and Accounting Service in Indianapolis. During this time, I became a member of the Board of Directors at Bosma Enterprises and was eventually appointed the president and CEO.

Employment is the backbone of our society. It allows people to live independently and support their families. Across the country, 60 to 70 percent of people with a disability are not employed. This is not because they do not want to work or are incapable, but because of the lack of comprehensive training services giving individuals the skills needed or opportunity and support from employers once they find a job.

The federal AbilityOne Program is designed to create employment opportunities for people with disabilities. It leverages the procurement of needed goods and services for the government to create employment at a fair market price. There is a network of nearly 500 nonprofit agencies nationwide. At one of those AbilityOne-affiliated agencies, an employee who was blind produced the combat helmet that saved my life.

Bosma Enterprises is the primary provider of exam and surgical gloves to the Department of Veteran Affairs through AbilityOne. Over 50% of our workforce is visually impaired and employed at all levels of the company and are paid competitive wages and benefits. The employees are proud to serve our nation's veterans and were essential to their protection during the pandemic. Bosma is an employer of choice, as evidenced by our low turnover rate and high employee satisfaction ratings. Our mission is to create opportunities for people who are blind, but it is a work environment where its employees can thrive and have room to advance if they choose.

In addition to employment, Bosma offers statewide blind rehabilitation and training. We came to offer these programs because the state of Indiana asked to transition them to us as they saw our success in employing individuals who are blind. These programs operate at a deficit; however, this public-private partnership thrives because of the AbilityOne Program, Indiana's support, and donors' generosity.

As part of our rehabilitation services, we also have a dedicated team that assists individuals with vision loss to find employment outside our organization. Everyone should have a choice of where they want to work. Just as employment is the backbone of society, individualism and choice are paramount to our freedom as Americans.

Unfortunately, people who are blind are facing challenges to that freedom. The government has severely limited or eliminated AbilityOne agencies as potential choices for employment because they don't fit into their outdated definition of competitive integrated employment. This limits employment and creates a stigma that people who have disabilities working alongside disabled colleagues do not have value. We would never tell wounded warriors they can't work with other wounded warriors. But that is precisely what government agencies are doing when trying to tell a person they can't work someplace that employs people with disabilities. As I have described, Bosma has blind employees working in various positions throughout the company, including 15 leaders with vision loss. All employees are offered opportunities for cross-training, upward mobility, and provided assistance if they want to seek employment elsewhere.

Bosma Enterprises is a perfect example of how a public-private partnership can work to serve people with disabilities by providing the dignity of work, competitive pay and benefits, and turning taxtakers into taxpayers.

Thank you again for this opportunity.