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**Subject:** [EXTERNAL]: Please support Small business grants to the maxium level  
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Good morning. I am writing as the President of the Greater Hazleton Chamber of Commerce to ask you to consider the maximum amount for the small business grant program through the Federal COVID relief funds. We are quickly approaching the two year anniversary of the shut down and Covid impact on every aspect of our lives and the small business sector continues to struggle.

The Greater Hazleton has over 600 members, of which 78% are businesses with under 50 employees. These businesses are the heartbeat of our area. From Insurance agents, to dry cleaners, to restaurants and auto body shops they have all experienced business disruption. The shutdown phase was quickly followed by increased costs related to cleaning and compliance with new Covid safe standards. An additional problem has been supply chain issues, where small businesses without large orders do not have preferred status and have endured longer waits or the option to get the items at a higher price. The third element has been the labor cost, which has also been the most challenging for small businesses. These businesses now have to compete with companies who have raised employee hourly wages as much as \$3.00 to \$4.00 an hour. The impact to small businesses has created reduced hours in order to be able to handle business with less employees. Small businesses are also seeing the cost of basic utilities increase and no relief in sight.

The opportunity for a grant to assist them through this final phase, where again for all intents and purposes we had another shut down period in the first quarter of 2022. The grants will be welcome relief to our neighbors and friends as we continue to progress toward POST COVID norms.

I will be at the meeting tonight via zoom and offer just one of the many stories I hear on a daily basis about the challenging conditions of being a small business owner today. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to call.

Thank you for your work on behalf of the residents of our County.

Sincerely

**MARY**

Mary R. Malone

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