



As the U.S. population becomes more diverse with growing minority populations, it stands to reason that a diverse economy is a strong economy. Businesses that embrace our country's changing demographics help to fuel our economy.

*As we continue our series of looking at the state of diversity and business in various states in the U.S., we focus this issue on the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV) region, the home of **Necole Parker** of the **ELOCEN Group**.*

Small businesses, numbering 66,514 in 2012 in the District of Columbia, employed about half of the state's private workforce in 2012 and make up 92.2 percent of all employers in the District according to the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA).

Business ownership is also inclusive in the District with the SBA reporting that 29.6 percent of woman-owned businesses make up the professional, scientific, and technical services industry. African Americans make up 16.4 percent, Hispanics make up 27.4 percent, and Asians represent 21.7 percent.

In Maryland, small businesses represent 97.5 percent of all employers and employ 51.6 percent of the private sector labor force. Small businesses are crucial to the fiscal condition of the state and employed half of the state's private workforce in 2011. The SBA also reported that there were an estimated 176,000 woman-owned businesses and 168,000 minority-owned businesses.

According to the SBA, there were 674,256 small businesses in Virginia in 2012 that employed about 1.5 million of the state's private workforce in 2012. The agency also reported that woman-owned firms made up 17.4 percent of companies in the professional, scientific, and technical services industry.

*We caught up with one of the region's leaders in business and diversity affairs **Sharon Pinder**, president and CEO, **Capital Region Minority Supplier Development Council (CRMSDC)** for her perspective on the state of minority-owned businesses in the region.*

What is the current state of supplier diversity in the region?

"We are in a great place for business opportunities. Many minority businesses are finding business in both the public and private sectors. Constitutionally, the DMV, particularly Maryland, is the most progressive in the country in terms of laws on the books. It is a source of pride that diversity and inclusion of minority businesses is an expectation of government and our private sector," she said.

However, "From an implementation standpoint—we are in a state of confusion. Why? It doesn't always appear that our compliance capabilities are as robust as they can be. We've

become so goal driven that is sometimes at the expense of building companies with capacity. The outcome of a healthy economy should be to build competitively viable companies—specifically minority companies."

What changes have you seen over the past few years in terms of opportunities for M/WBEs in the region?

"Over the last few years we've seen changes in terms of the ability of minority businesses to drive the economy. More are prime contractors and have the ability to satisfy the needs of the marketplace," Pinder said. "In the CRMSDC, for example, our job is to provide our corporate and government members with a pipeline of certified minority suppliers who are willing, qualified, and ready to provide their products and services to support the needs of their supply chains. To give you a perspective, of our certified suppliers, 56 percent of them have annual revenues of \$1 million or more; 20 percent have revenues of \$10 million or more."

What is the business environment like in the DMV for M/WBEs?

Right now, business opportunities are good. We are fortunate because we sit at the largest seat of government in the country. On the public sector side, we can take advantage of many of the programs offered such as 8(a), GSA, sole sourcing, and more. Major money is being spent in this region in infrastructure. Between Baltimore, D.C., and Northern Virginia—billions will be spent in water and sewage projects.

Equally as robust on the private sector side, we have some of the largest government contractors in the country located in our region. Locally, nearly 50 of the major Fortune 500 companies have offices in the Capital Region, which is also the location of leading world, national, and regional healthcare, financial, information technology, and educational institutions. The CRMSDC is very fortunate that many of its member companies are industry titans.

What improvements would you like to see in terms of opportunities for M/WBEs in the area?

I started an initiative "The New Majority Initiative." Given the demographic shift we've seen in this region, ethnic minorities who are now the new majority, must collectively exercise its power—socially, economically, and politically in order to redefine the distribution of new wealth in this country. ♦