



Written Testimony of Abdirahman Kahin

Owner of Afro Deli

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Chairman Yarmuth, Ranking Member Womack, and members of the committee;

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Abdirahman Kahin, and I am the owner of Afro Deli, small fast casual chain of restaurants in Minnesota.

I'm here today to share my humble experience and my perspective on the positive impact immigrants have in every community I've been a part of.

Today, I share my personal story but I wouldn't be here before you today *without* the support of many others who have walked similar paths.

I immigrated to the United States in 1996 and have been blessed to call the state of Minnesota my home since 1997. I came to the U.S. like many immigrants, to find safety and opportunity, as an asylum seeker: a young man from Somalia without much experience or skills.

In Minnesota, I found a rich immigrant community from all over the globe and an opportunity to create the life I dreamed about. I worked as an overnight parking attendant for my first job, which was perfect because it allowed me to go to ESL classes in the evenings before work. After that, I was able to attend community college and learn the skills I needed to start my first business, a media production company. In the ten years after, I opened several other businesses before I found my passion in the hospitality industry. My American dream evolved and I now wanted to open my own unique restaurant with a new concept. Healthy, fresh, accessible African food made to order and affordable. *An African Chipotle, but more.*

I realized my dream in 2010 when I opened Afro Deli. In Afro Deli, I saw a vehicle to bridge cultures, build a successful business, and contribute back to my local community in a meaningful way. We now have expanded to 3 locations with a fourth location opening next month.

Culture

Afro Deli's culture is rooted in the belief that good food has the power to bring people together. When we sit down to eat, we share a common connection to the world *through the ingredients in our dishes*. Everything from Afro Deli's customers, to our employees, to our menu aligns with a strong commitment to our community and to diversity. As a result, Afro Deli has an atmosphere as a 'community meeting', where a mix of people – from students, CEOs and even Malala Yousafzai – come for a great experience.

Customers

Afro Deli's innovative integration of community and business is a large part of our success. For our customers, Afro Deli is more than just another business. It is a place that deeply connects with their values. A local place they can be proud to patronize and recommend to their friends and family. (Our customers are our family and they appreciate our commitment to local community work because they are just as committed themselves. *Don't get me wrong. I'm pretty sure they like the food as well.*)

Food

Our core food is African fusion but our menu is intentionally diverse to meet people where they are. We keep it simple and approachable while providing options for the most picky palates. Over the years, our menu has also evolved from the feedback our customers and we have added more items to give more options to our customers of all dietary needs, *as well as new tasty items when asked*. We are committed to continuing to serve a wide range of eaters and giving our customers excellent quality food, every time they visit us. This accessibility, consistency and convenience makes customers feel good about what they're eating.

Staff

Our staff at Afro Deli is as diverse as our customers and we're proud to offer good jobs in a supportive and inclusive workplace. *We often joke that Afro Deli is the only place in Minnesota where a Japanese-American cooks African food.*

The restaurant industry can be challenging and I have been successful by focusing on and supporting our employees. This is why I championed paid sick leave – something Afro Deli has always offered to staff – to push other business owners to support working families, improve

working conditions, and reduce turnover. In addition, we have been able to provide other benefits too including vacation time and parental leave for new mothers or fathers.

We also regularly host birthday celebrations, potlucks, and employee appreciation events. Most of our staff have been working with us for more than 7 years so we have a close and supportive family environment. We take in pride in being diverse organization where Americans of different origins work together and individuals are encouraged to be who they are, and be proud of themselves. We have over 60 employees and half are immigrants themselves.

Community

As proud members of every community we're in, Afro Deli directly supports local initiatives and community organizations that do good. We offer donations of food, money, and time to a wide variety of good causes because it's part of our dna. Whether it's spearheading an initiative like Dine Out for Somalia to raise money for famine relief efforts 2017 or offering free meals to our furloughed neighbors as a small token of our appreciation of their public service; giving back is an important part of our organizational culture. Personally, I have been honored to serve on several local and national boards, and encourage my staff to do so as well.

Our efforts to contribute to our local community don't end with our nonprofit partners. Afro Deli is also intentional about establishing business partnerships with local farmers and small business owners where possible. This means the majority of our meats, produce, and other ingredients are sourced locally and from local small businesses in the Twin Cities area, with most being minority or woman owned as well.

We work with local minority suppliers and traditionally disadvantaged businesses because we want to create more opportunities for others so they may pass it forward. When these businesses grow in our community, they hire more community members and everyone benefits. In this way, we support the growth of local economy and try to improve the lives of those we encounter everyday. Giving back to our community is a fundamental piece of Afro Deli's culture and we've been proud to serve where we can.

Afro Deli is an integral part of, and is firmly rooted in, the fabric of Minnesota. We're proud to be a product of Minnesota and believe we represent the best our state has to offer. Our

customers span across all age, social, and income groups, and we're proud to be a bridge across cultures by offering great food and a rich social/cultural dining experience.

Over the last 8 years, we have expanded to 3 locations and over 50 employees, with plans for 3 more locations over the next two years. In fact, we will be opening our fourth location next month in downtown Minneapolis. We have been successful because of our community's support and it is our connection with our community that anchors our success.

Conclusion

To conclude, my immigrant experience is not unusual and I'm thankful for the opportunity I have had to build a life for myself and give back to the community, state, and country that has given me that opportunity.

I'm proud of Afro Deli's growth so far and I, with the support of a great team, have plans to continue growing. My goal is to continue expanding and open Afro Delis in every city and state across the country, becoming the first national African restaurant chain the U.S. I want to grow so I can share our food, our culture, and our values with everyone across the country. I believe food has no borders and has the power to convene people in meaningful ways.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide my humble perspective on the positive impact of immigration in my life and my community. Please let me know if I can answer any questions or provide you with any additional information.