

# Chamber leaders call for government help to increase minority-owned business access to aid

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Latino Chamber of Commerce and Black Chamber of Commerce leaders are calling for more volunteers and government help to make sure Latino- and Black-owned businesses have access to economic assistance and know how to safely open their businesses.

Latino chamber President Jessica Cavazos (pictured above) and Black chamber President Camille Carter said one of the biggest problems businesses faced during the COVID-19 pandemic was a lack of education on how to take advantage of government assistance programs like the Paycheck Protection Program and small business loans.

According to a Green Bay Press Gazette review of PPP loans given to Wisconsin businesses, of the 17 percent that did report race, over 92 percent were given to businesses owned by white people, 2.45 percent to Hispanic people and 0.93 percent to Black people.

The duo told a Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce briefing that many of their members don't get the same attention from banks because they don't usually have strong relationships. Many of those banks were experiencing their own staffing issues related to the pandemic, forcing many Black and Latino business owners to turn to the chamber offices for support.

While both leaders said their offices have been working around the clock and engaging as many volunteers as possible, the huge influx of calls and requests for help inundated their small amount of resources.

“This whole wrench that was thrown at us was a test of our resiliency and how we’re going to operate,” said Cavazos. “It was like a 24-hour war room here at the chamber.”

Now that the early pandemic shutdowns are over, many of those calls are coming from businesses wanting to start doing business again without harming their customers and their communities.

Because many Latino- and Black-owned businesses are part of the service industry, they could benefit from state or local government health teams visiting businesses to advise them on how to safely reopen.

“Like the A-Team of social distancing to go out into these communities that are vulnerable and teach and go business to business,” said Cavazos.

Carter said Madison has done a great job coming out with a plan on how to deal with the coronavirus.

“But I don’t know that we have the magic answer other than maintaining the public health standards and maintaining social distancing,” said Carter.

While Carter said the plans have been clear, Cavazos said the mandates don’t provide enough information for businesses to know how to continue operating

without putting their community members at risk.

“In order to protect our community, our business owners are saying to us that they’re okay with having masks and handing out masks,” said Carter. “They’re okay with the mandate.”

*-By Adam Kelnhofer*

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