[STORE LOGO]

[DATE]

[THE HONORABLE][FIRST NAME][LAST NAME]  
[ADDRESS]  
[CITY][STATE][ZIP CODE]

Dear [SENATOR] [REPRESENTATIVE]:

As an independent bookseller in [CITY, STATE], I am writing today to introduce myself and share with you what I hope will be helpful and actionable insight into the state of local businesses in my area. Main Street retailers and other small businesses are the engine of our economy and the key job creators, so I want to call on you to support Main Street retailers by [supporting policies to make it easier for small businesses to gain access to capital] [making sure the Department of Labor’s overtime rules take into account the economics of small businesses] [that the Durbin Amendment, which caps swipe fees, is left out of any attempt to repeal Dodd-Frank].

I do know much has been made about the decline of Main Street businesses but actually there has been a resurgence in indie bookselling over the past five years. While not every bookstore or community has seen this growth, the national trends are very clear. New stores are opening. There has been a 35 percent increase in the number of independent bookstore locations since 2009, existing stores are opening in new locations, and established stores are beings successfully sold to new owners, often younger owners as a new generation of booksellers enters the industry.

The “Localism” movement has become a major influence in the decisions of consumers regarding where they will make their purchases and spend their dollars. Nationally, literally millions of consumers are deciding to shop in a locally owned business, like mine, because it is locally owned.

While things are looking up for locally owned businesses, we still face many challenges. I feel it is essential that small businesses like mine be provided a seat at a table when lawmakers and officials are seeking guidance, especially when it comes to CHOOSE ONE: [policies to facilitate small business access to capital] [amending the Department of Labor overtime rules] [attempts to repeal the Durbin Amendment that caps so-called “swipe fees.”].

[ACCESS TO CAPITAL] As the new congress moves forward, we believe it is crucial that policies are enacted that strengthens and expands community banks and allows credit unions to make more small business loans. Over the past 16 years, small businesses and entrepreneurs have found it harder to get loans, while the opposite is true for large businesses. Since 2000, bank lending to large businesses is up 36 percent, while small business loan volume has fallen 14 percent and “micro” business loans — those under $100,000 — have plummeted 33 percent, according to research by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance (ILSR).

One resul of this credit shortage is that many small businesses are either not adequately capitalized or have been forced to rely on high-cost alternatives, such as credit cards. Both scenarios make them more susceptible to failing. The effect on the national economy is significant. Small businesses are one of the primary sources of new job creation, but access to sufficient capital has dampened the growth of many independents, and, in many cases, forced businesses to close.

We urge you to enact policies to strengthen and expand community banks, which currently provide more than half of small business lending. It is imperative that congress address the disproportionate toll that regulations adopted in the wake of the financial crisis are taking on small banks and look to increase new bank charter approvals, which have plummeted in recent years.

In addition, while current regulations limit business loans to no more than 12.5 percent of a credit union’s assets, we would an amendment to current regulations to exempt loans to businesses with fewer than 20 employees from the cap. This would ensure that new credit union lending benefits truly small businesses, rather than simply allowing a few large national credit unions (the only ones close to hitting the current cap) to increase large business loans.

[TEXT DRAFT FOR OVERTIME RULES ] In late 2016, a rule that was set to go into effect December 1, 2016, that clarified that any worker who makes less than $47,476 per year or $913 per week would be eligible for overtime pay if they worked more than 40 hours per week, regardless of job title or description. And while a federal judge in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas has issued a ruling that bars the new U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) overtime rule from going into effect in all 50 states, it is my hope that the threshold be revisited before it goes into effect – if it ever does.

I believe the rules, which doubled the threshold, were bad policy and disregarded the economics of running a small business. I am not opposed to increasing the threshold, but I would urge the Department of Labor to do so in a thoughtful and pragmatic matter. A successful independent bookstore will work at about a 2 percent profit, so the idea of doubling the threshold could have been extremely harmful to my business, and businesses just like mine. I hope that this timeout provided by the court in Texas provides Congress a chance to take another look at the impact of these rules.

[TEXT DRAFT FOR SWIPE FEE LETTER] I urge you to oppose an amendment in the Financial Choice Act that looks to repeal of the Durbin Amendment, a measure that regulates swipe fees charged by banks for debit-card transactions. Under the Durbin "swipe fee" amendment, the Federal Reserve has the authority to develop regulations to ensure that swipe fees imposed on debit card transactions are proportional to the cost incurred in processing the transactions. The regulation also prohibits credit card companies from restricting the ability of businesses to offer discounts for payments made by cash, checks, debit cards, or credit cards.

There is no question that the cap on swipe fees is working for small businesses. In 2012, almost two years after the Durbin “swipe fee” amendment was signed into law, the Federal Reserve reported that the average interchange fee has nearly been halved. If banks are allowed to increase card interchange fees at will, this could have a severe impact on small businesses like mine as we would be forced to either absorb the higher cost or pass it onto consumers. Either way, it will have a negative impact on small businesses.

I hope we can meet to discuss these issues in person at a time that is convenient for you. Or , alternatively, my colleagues and I would be pleased to meet with you at my store..

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,