

United States Senate

Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

Hearing Title: Building the Ladder of Opportunity: What's Working to Make the American Dream a Reality for Middle Class Families

Good morning, and thank you Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Enzi, and Members of the Committee; it is a privilege to be here today.

My name is Sarah Corey and I am the Director of Public Relations for a company called IceStone. I'm here to share with you IceStone's unique story, and illustrate how our company is part of an American manufacturing renaissance, creating safe, good jobs that pay a living wage.

Eight years ago, Peter Strugatz and Miranda Magagnini co-founded IceStone, LLC in Brooklyn, New York. Both Brooklyn natives, Peter and Miranda envisioned a company that would invigorate the local economy and challenge the notion that America's industrial age had passed. They believed that a manufacturing renaissance could be possible through the creation of green collar jobs. Like so many American entrepreneurs, they embarked on a journey to create a better future for their children. They found their inspiration in America's landfills.

Since 2003, IceStone has diverted 10 million pounds of glass from the waste stream through the production of its eponymous durable surfaces. IceStone durable surfaces contain three core ingredients: 100% recycled glass, cement, and pigment. There are no carcinogenic resins or toxic chemicals in IceStone, so our products are safe, for the employees who make the material, and for the families who prepare their meals on IceStone countertops. We procure 100% of the cement of our surfaces and 100% of our glass from American suppliers. Every slab is cast in Brooklyn; our day-lit 19th century Navy Yard factory is both a reminder of our industrial heritage and proof that innovation often requires reflecting on the past. We are proof that America can regain a competitive advantage in the global economy by creating green products and paying wages that support families. Today, IceStone employs 45 full-time men and women, each dedicated to the same ethos that inspired our co-founders; a successful business places equal value on social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and fiscal profitability. We call this the "triple bottom line".

(A green collar job is one that pays a living wage, and directly improves environmental (and therefore societal) quality.

For the purposes of today's hearing, I will focus on IceStone's social bottom line, which has three key attributes: job training, a living wage, and employee health and safety.

Job training is an essential component of the IceStone employee experience. Each employee creates a professional development plan every year. More than any other tool, the development plan empowers us to take a proactive role in the direction and evolution of our work. It captures our goals and details the resources needed to achieve them, inspires pride in our work, and has served as a road map for entry and executive -level employees alike. In 2010, our lead technician, Jose Gomez, completed a five-day workshop in Total Productive Maintenance. By participating in the workshop, Jose expanded his arsenal of skills required for his job, which enabled him to identify and prevent potential equipment issues throughout the factory. This led to increased efficiency and in turn, Jose received an increase in wages. Other employees have used their professional development plans to explore skills unrelated to their day-to-day work. This summer, for example, a member of our Operations Team named Luke Keller left the factory floor a few hours each week to work with the Marketing team and hone his video production skills. The capacity building that Jose and Luke have found at IceStone should be accessible for every working American, and is a critical part of strengthening America's middle class.

The second key attribute of our social bottom line is the living wage. The minimum wage in the state of New York is \$7.25. Any of you who are familiar with the monthly cost of riding New York's subway can attest to the inadequacy of this wage. At IceStone, we believe that all employees have a right to a wage that will provide shelter, food, and other basic necessities for their families. We also believe that a living wage includes benefits, and currently, all IceStone employees have access to health and dental care.

(Living wage rates factor the cost of living in a particular area, and the size of a family.)

Providing such benefits, coupled with a safe work environment is the third pillar of IceStone's social bottom line. Our company has a low employee turn over rate, a high number of employee referrals, and promotes a culture of inclusion and service. It doesn't end there. IceStone strives to make positive social, environmental, and economic impacts beyond the gates of the Navy Yard. To that end, we've co-founded B Corporation, a network of 427 companies that prove businesses have the power to solve social and environmental issues. To date, five states have signed legislation that recognizes B Corporations and holds the leaders of such companies accountable for the material impact their businesses have on society, stakeholders and the environment. IceStone is part of the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, and has partnered with an elementary school in Brooklyn where employees collaborated with 5th grade teachers to create a curriculum on sustainable careers and recycling. We also partner with organizations like AHRC, which provides work and services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The question posed by the committee today is, "what's working to make the American dream a reality for middle class families?" I believe that sustainable, innovative businesses like IceStone are effectively bridging the gap between reality and the Dream. There is still much work to be done, and IceStone's growth would

not be possible without state and federal capital. Legislation similar to Senator Gilibrand's Made in America block grant program is needed to support the new wave of manufacturing in our country. However, above all else, America's workers need and deserve triple bottom line careers that improve the quality of life for their families, their local communities, and the planet.

(The five states that have passed B Corp legislation are: Hawaii, Maryland, New Jersey, Vermont, and Virginia. Pending legislation: California, Colorado, Michigan, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania)