



News Release

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Business and Trade Association Leaders to Participate in First National Regulatory Fairness Hearing

WASHINGTON - The Office of the National Ombudsman at the U.S. Small Business Administration will host a national regulatory fairness hearing in Washington D.C. on March 16 from 10 a.m. to noon. This event, which will be held at the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) East Building, will give leaders from business organizations and trade associations an opportunity to comment on unfair or excessive federal regulatory enforcement that impacts their members and small businesses nationwide.

"This is a great opportunity for these groups to weigh in on the challenges their small business members face when trying to comply with regulations for their respective industries," said SBA National Ombudsman Nicholas Owens.

"It's even more of a challenge for America's small businesses when the enforcement of regulations is excessive, rather than effective and even-handed."

The national hearing, Owens said, will also function as an information session on how the Office of the National Ombudsman serves as "troubleshooter" for the nation's small businesses. "We'd like the representatives, on behalf of their association's members, to come away with a better understanding of how the national ombudsman is a vital resource for America's small business owners," said Owens.

The Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act of 1996 created the Office of the National Ombudsman within the SBA, and established 10 regional regulatory fairness boards nationwide.

Each year a series of public regulatory fairness hearings are held around the country. These hearings are usually chaired by the National Ombudsman and regional board members and attended by officials from various federal regulatory agencies. During the hearings, small business owners have an opportunity to testify in person, presenting their concerns about unfair practices or burdensome policies imposed on them by federal agencies, without fear of retaliatory action. Business owners also have the option of submitting their comments in writing to the National Ombudsman.

The upcoming national hearing will follow a similar format. During a typical regional hearing, comments from business owners are forwarded to the appropriate federal agency for their review. The National Ombudsman asks the federal agency to respond within a specified time period. In many instances the federal agency has reduced or waived particular penalties and/or compliance actions. At a minimum, the Agencies direct a high-level review of the enforcement action to ensure fairness. Comments from the national hearing will also be included in the National Ombudsman's annual report to Congress, which rates federal agencies on responsiveness to small business concerns.

For more information on the national hearing, contact Martin Gold in the Office of the National Ombudsman at martin.gold@sba.gov, or by phone at (202) 205-7549. To learn more about the Office of the National Ombudsman, visit the Web site at www.sba.gov/ombudsman.

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