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January 27, 2022

To the Committee on Science, Space, and Technology:

The U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives (USFWC) applauds the House's introduction of the America COMPETES Act, its version of the US Innovation and Competition Act (USICA), which was passed in the Senate last year, for its inclusion of the Regional Innovation Act.

This legislation can pave the way for long-term community wealth-building and access for historically marginalized communities. As many Americans continue to face the compounding effects of the pandemic as well as lack of stable, well-paying jobs, this deeply-needed bill will bring resources for workers to develop skills, build equitable businesses, and get the support they need to ensure thriving, lasting workplaces.

As a membership organization representing a majority workforce of women and people of color, the USFWC recognizes that developing our workforce for the diversity of Americans requires collaboration across public and private organizations, particularly those with deeply rooted ties to their local communities. It is crucial to support strategies for a more inclusive economy, leveraging the expertise of those closest to the problems.

Thanks to the bipartisan support of legislators in both the House and Senate, the Regional Innovation Act will help to build healthy, equitable, and sustainable communities. It will create not just well-paying jobs, but also strong, durable businesses that will strengthen communities in both rural and urban areas. This legislation goes beyond traditional tech centers, innovating and iterating to serve the needs of low-income and underserved populations by emphasizing the importance of cooperative ownership as a tool for wealth-building.

Through the success of cooperatives like Isthmus Engineering, which creates custom automation equipment; Opportunity Threads, a cut-and-sew shop in North Carolina; and cooperative platforms like Up & Go, which helps small businesses in the home cleaning industry maximize resources, we know that innovation comes in many forms and requires an array of committed, local stakeholders to achieve success. Supporting the Regional Innovation Hub initiative is an investment in rebuilding our economy and creating opportunities for small businesses to grow.

We are pleased to see that this bill includes cooperative strategies and hope that the final language of the bill will maintain these provisions that will create good jobs and strong businesses well into the future.

In cooperation,

Mo Manklang  
Policy Director, U.S. Federation of Worker Cooperatives