

Raimondo takes steps to boost minority businesses

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PROVIDENCE, R.I. - Gov. Gina M. Raimondo announced two new executive orders Thursday aimed to help the state's minority business community. Raimondo said the orders would create a Diversity in Construction Working Group and a new council to advise the state's Office of Diversity Equity and Opportunity. She said one goal is to double by 2020 the rate of state contracts going to businesses owned by minorities, women and people with disabilities.

In fiscal 2014 and 2015, an estimated 4 percent of the state's procurement dollars were awarded to these groups. In fiscal 2016, this estimate rose to 6.3 percent. The goal announced Thursday aims to raise the utilization rate to 12 percent by 2020. "We've made progress in opening doors for minority-owned and women-owned businesses, as well as businesses owned by people with certified disabilities, but it's not enough," Raimondo said. "We need a system that is fair across the board, and we need supports in place that further encourage activity in our diverse economy. Today, I'm setting a firm goal and making strides to ensure Rhode Island is leveling the playing field for those who want to conduct business in this state."

"Rhode Island can only grow if we support a vibrant small business community," Urban Ventures Executive Director Jr. Neville Songwe said. "Successful enterprises can come from all kinds of backgrounds given the right support. Urban Ventures is thankful to Governor Raimondo for working to expand opportunities for community businesses to make their mark on Rhode Island's economy."

"As the Latino owner of a family construction business, I am proud and honored to join the Governor in today's announcement," Heroica Construction President Jhonny Leyva said. "For almost a decade, we've been hard at work growing our company and offering cost-effective solutions here in Rhode Island. Today, the Governor is standing up to say businesses like ours deserve a fair shot."

"The ODEO [Office of Diversity Equity and Opportunity] is excited about today's announcement to further support the minority business community," ODEO Associate Director Cheryl Burrell said. "The Governor has already made significant progress to promote opportunities for this community, and now she's taking more action to invest in our success."