

## **Policy Committee Hearing Testimony**

Good afternoon Chairman Reed, Representative Hackett and members of the Committee. Thank you for inviting me to participate in this important hearing on small businesses and job creation. My name is Joe Solomon and I am the founder and President of Provident Energy Consulting, an energy consulting firm located in Media, PA.

My company is truly a small business – employing four full-time and one part-time staff. Two years ago, feeling comfortable that our business was going pretty well, I added one full-time staff member, and just 2 months ago, I added another – a recent graduate of the Penn State “Energy, Business and Finance” program. I suspect my concerns and problems are as large as most other small businesses. I’d like to briefly touch on some of the issues I face on a day-to-day basis and offer some suggestions for ways the Commonwealth can help business owners like me.

First, I’d like to give you a little bit of background on my Company. I founded Provident Energy in 1997 in order to help other companies lower their energy costs. Our mantra for our clients is “use energy more effectively and pay less for the energy being used”. We assist in energy efficiency and facility improvement

recommendations; and, through our status as a PA PUC licensed broker/marketer of both electricity and natural gas supply, in the contracting and purchase of energy in the competitive retail markets. I'm proud that we have been successful and growing due to a pursuit of excellence in our technical and financial acumen. Coupled with that is our core mission of being much more than a broker, with an energy consulting focus and a strong commitment to customer support.

Probably the most vexing issue I face as President and Owner of a small, technically and financially focused company is the daunting bureaucratic aspect of running my business. When I started Provident Energy, I knew I possessed the technical and financial knowledge to assist clients. But, even with my engineering background and an MBA in Finance, I struggled with where to turn for help with insurance issues, employee benefits and other basic business management elements. I found my way, after some pain, by engaging a good insurance provider, accountant, payroll firm, etc. I was fortunate enough to be able to afford such outside help ... and discover QuickBooks!

What I struggle with most is the "human resources" part of being an employer, which I imagine other entrepreneurs face in trying to deal with these same issues.

In that my Company provides a very unique technical and financial service that requires years of on-the-job training before a newly hired individual is ready to “go it alone”, a primary focus of mine is on getting that new hire the shadowing experience necessary to grow them into an independent worker and solid energy consultant. Thus, even while maintaining our most important focus of supporting clients and continuing to build the business, we, collectively as a staff, must devote time on a daily basis to overseeing the training of new employees while also juggling the business management, client management and growth aspects of my business, Provident Energy Consulting.

I suspect that many small business owners don't have the time to develop and maintain HR programs and/or manuals, or even understand the pros and cons of offering such benefits as 401K programs, life and long-term disability insurance, vacation and sick leave accruals, etc., all of which are of critical interest to the better future employees in the job market. Assistance in this area would be a great help, whether from a simple publication, guidebook or, better yet, an actual template for an HR manual from a Commonwealth Department or Bureau. That and supplemental assistance via a phone number to speak to an individual to ask

questions would be a valuable resource for small business owners in Pennsylvania as we try to grow our businesses, stimulate the economy, and get people to work.

Once again, thank you to Chairman Reed and Representative Hackett for their invitation to speak to you today. I'd also like to thank you all for your concern and commitment to the small business owners of Pennsylvania and for your indulgence today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you might have.