HEARING BEFORE THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE

On

INNOVATION FORUM AND SHOWCASE

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Testimony of Eric R. Parker, AIA
Founder & President, theClubhou.se

I.   Introduction:

Thank you, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and members of this committee. I would also like to thank Congressman Allen, who before serving as our Congressman, mentored our community of entrepreneurs, including myself. It is with a deep sense of honor that I sit before you today representing the activities of our organization, and the growth that we help foster in Georgia's 12th District, South Carolina's 2nd District, and beyond. I am Eric Parker, an Augusta native, a Georgia Tech graduate, an Architect, and an Entrepreneur. In 2012, I founded a non-profit organization, called theClubhou.se. Our mission is to inspire ideas, create companies, and build community, by connecting learners and leaders in technology, business, and design.

To help you understand our organization's work and why it matters, it helps to start with my own story. Like many young people from smaller cities, I was convinced that making my mark in the world meant leaving my hometown. After college, I moved to Silicon Valley. I started an architecture firm and worked with the top research and technology companies of the world. I thrived in a culture of technology and entrepreneurship, managing over $100m of construction projects. Then 2008 happened. In the week after Lehman Brothers collapsed, all but one client put their projects on indefinite hold. This precipitated my move back to Augusta, GA.

I was angry and lost. I felt let down by the American dream. I faced a turning point, to be angry and complain about the situation or take control and create the opportunities I craved. Our work is based on the belief that entrepreneurship is a vital part of America's promise, a central means of securing our unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In other words, don't wait for someone to give you a job you don't want when you can create the one you do. So in 2012 I convinced a small groups of makers, hackers, artists, and entrepreneurs to form a club where we could meet, collaborate, and work on the things we thought were interesting. Since then, we have helped build 59 companies that have created 155 jobs in our community. We partner with Augusta Technical College for a Code Bootcamp funded by the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. The Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation supports Startup Life, a 24/7 business accelerator which includes education, office space, and room & board for entrepreneurs. In partnership with Augusta University and funded by the Robert Wood Johnson

Foundation, we have developed a five city Mesh Network of Innovation linking collaborative workspaces in midsize communities to stimulate startups focused on improving health factors such as childhood poverty, education, housing, food, and physical inactivity.

The companies we support are diverse. Two-thirds of our entrepreneurs are women, minorities, or veterans. Their companies include; educational robotics, agricultural drones, microlending, email security, virtual reality, emergency management software, and encryption devices. We benefit from our proximity to two major Federal investments: Army Cyber Command at Ft. Gordon, and Savannah River National Lab.

Given today's technology, we can make virtually anything and can reach customers anywhere in the world. Yet the innovation economy has clustered its activity in fewer and fewer places. Growing entrepreneurs requires a cultural shift in our education system. We believe that our work helps develop the entrepreneurs needed to make every district economically competitive.

II. Community Snapshot

Augusta-Richmond County population	197,166
MSA population	600,151
African American	56.4%
Veteran	10.1%
High School graduation rate	78%
Childhood poverty rate	39%
Unemployment rate	6.7%
MSA GDP	$23.4B
Median Household Income	$38,458

Ten Largest Employers:
Savannah River Site
U.S. Army Signal Center & Ft. Gordon
Medical College of Georgia
Richmond County School System
University Hospital
Columbia County School System
Augusta Richmond County
VA Medical Center
E-Z-GO Textron
Gracewood State School & Hospital

III.   Major Initiatives of theClubhou.se:
a. Startup Life

Startup Life (http://StartupLife.theClubhou.se) is one of 14 grants awarded out of 800 applicants in 2017 as part of the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation's Inclusion Open Challenge. Startup Life aims to eliminate the barriers that exist between entrepreneurs and success. In our community, entrepreneurs often cannot afford to leave work to focus on and pursue their vision. Our capital markets are limited and unemployment is higher than the state average. In spite of our low cost of living, startups involve enormous risk with little social safety net. We aim to use these conditions to our advantage. We provide one year of entrepreneur support with:

- Furnished dormitory housing
- Nutritious healthy locally sourced food
- Transportation and access to public transportation
- 20 week curricula in design empathy, ideation, iteration, team collaboration, customer experience, financial literacy, and automation & rapid prototyping technologies.
- Full computer lab and makerspace access
- Full coworking access with desk, wifi, coffee, and community
- 32 weeks of ongoing support through mentorship, and connections to resources, capital, and communities to scale their business
- Connections to business and investment community, government services, guided educational workshops, marketing and public relations opportunities.

Our experience in supporting startups has told us that the success of a business is directly proportional to the amount of focus an entrepreneur is able to provide it. By focusing on the elimination of expenses, as opposed to startup capital requirements, we can fully leverage our community's low cost of living to harness the creative problem solving capacity of the entrepreneur.

b. Mesh Network of Innovation for Public Health

The Mesh Network of Innovation (http://InnovationMesh.com) creates the infrastructure to support a network of innovation nodes in small and medium-size cities to foster improved community engagement, tracking, and opportunity to scale businesses amongst demographically similar markets. theClubhou.se in collaboration with Augusta University:

- Organized 5 entrepreneur led collaborative workspaces in mid-size communities in Georgia, including Athens, Augusta, Columbus, Macon, and Rome.
- Built and launched a common, customizable platform (for member communication, event management, project sharing and collaboration, outreach and promotion, social media integration, job listings, and tracking investment deals)

- Coordinated a Southeast Startup Challenge (http://SoutheastStartupChallenge.com) across the cities focused on identifying 10 scalable businesses that address public health challenges in their communities.
- Hosted a summit on public health innovation to connect representatives from communities, academia, government, funders (public and private), and entrepreneurs, awarding 2 startups with $25,000 in grants and services to grow their business.

c. Code Bootcamp

As a center focused on innovation with its roots as a makerspace, developer education is a natural part of our environment. We reached out to nine local companies and asked if there was a need in the Augusta area for this training. The answer was yes. Code Bootcamp (http://codeschool.theclubhou.se) is a partnership with Augusta Technical College funded by the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act to provide students with training that qualifies them to start new careers as junior developers.

- Students are immersed in a 12 week full time program where they learn seven programming languages through multiple hands on projects.
- Industry partners meet with students weekly to provide guest lectures, project reviews, set workplace expectations, and express hiring consideration for all graduates.
- We coach students in soft skills and organize an end of program job fair.
- Our graduates leave with a continuing education certificate and transcript from Augusta Tech, and 80% have found employment after graduation.

IV. List of Businesses supported

A3 Missions
Alan Venable Architect
AppVizo
Art of Chase Lanier
A.S.A.P.
Augusta Locally Grown
Augusta Sports Leagues
Avail Technologies
AztechMS
Biking to Victory
Black Fibre Studios
Cadence Games
Car Care Cash
Carter Beachum Communications
Community Cyber

CONima
Cre8
D.R.E.A.M.
Dino's Arcade
Dylan Pickups
E3 Embedded Systems
Electrolyte
Email Industries
Field Botanicals
Food IQ
Georgia Shift
Get Going
Holographic Optical Technologies
Hybrid Health IT
Impact Hunger

LGBTQMD
Marc Edwards, LLC
Medical Advocacy Partners
Minutemen Consulting
Mobile Mentors
Moonrise
My Doula
Nutrition Simply
Oasis Mobile Art Project
Paid in 5
Palmetto Cyber
PalmettoChain.io
Peacing Life Together
Perfect Storm Art Enrichment Center

Positive Hire	SightTech	Terror Tech
Puzzle Props	Skyraider	Transworld
R6 Industries	Slumdog Writers	Turf Scout
RANservices	Spark Academy	txtcam
Routine	Speak Easy Encryption	Universal Health Coin
RoVo Techs	Struggle Buddy	Upliff
Sand Hill Endeavors	Sumo Robot League	Verbatim
Score Clip Pro	Superginormous	Woodhams Electronics

V. Contact information

Eric R. Parker, AIA
Founder & President

Grace A. Belangia
Executive Director

theClubhou.se
540 Telfair Street
Augusta, GA 30901
http://theClubhou.se

(706) 723-5782