



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

James Sanders Jr.

## MWBE Advocacy Day Brings Urgency and Unity to Albany in the Push for Equity

JAMES SANDERS JR. May 23, 2025

| ISSUE: **MWBE**



**Albany, NY** — Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (MWBEs) from across New York State gathered in Albany this week for MWBE Advocacy Day, a pivotal event that brought together entrepreneurs, legislators, and state agencies to advance equity in public contracting and economic development.

**Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins** underscored the importance of maintaining and strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives in New York. “As efforts to roll back DEI initiatives gain momentum across the country, it’s more important than ever that we reaffirm our commitment to equity here in New York. DEI isn’t a threat — it’s a promise to break down walls and build longer tables so the next generation has a seat. The Senate Majority has consistently offered support for minority- and women-owned businesses through meaningful investments and legislative action that open doors for those too often left out. MWBE Advocacy Day is a vital opportunity to uplift these voices and keep their needs at the center of our work. I thank Senator Sanders for his leadership and for championing the continued advancement of MWBEs in our state.”

The day began with a breakfast at the Well in the Legislative Office Building, where MWBE business owners engaged directly with lawmakers and agency leaders. Conversations centered on strengthening New York’s MWBE program, especially the reauthorization of Article 15-A, which governs MWBE participation in public procurement.

“For more than three decades, the MWBE program has opened doors for entrepreneurs who have historically been left out of economic opportunity,” said **Senator Monica R. Martinez**. “It has helped reshape what business leadership looks like in our state, but there is still more work to be done. On MWBE Advocacy Day, I stand with advocates to support expanding and strengthening this program so it can continue driving growth for all New Yorkers.”

**Senator James Sanders Jr.**, Chair of the Senate Committee on Banks and a leading voice for MWBE equity, delivered a debrief on the status of 15-A during the day’s press conference. “We’ve come a long way, but the gap still exists,” said Senator Sanders. “We must continue to refine and enforce policies that empower minority and women-owned businesses. Equity is not a favor—it’s a right.”

The day featured remarks from Jason Clark, Executive Vice President of Empire State Development and Executive Director of the NYS Division of Minority & Women's Business Development. Agencies including the MTA also participated by offering resources at outreach tables.

Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn, Chair of the Subcommittee on Oversight of Minority- and Women-Owned Business Enterprises, emphasized the broader goals of the movement. "MWBE Advocacy Day 2025 reflects our continued commitment to advancing economic equity through meaningful legislative reform. Minority- and Women-owned Businesses are essential drivers of New York's economy, and it is our responsibility to eliminate the structural barriers that limit their full participation. By enacting policies that expand access to capital, contracts, and capacity-building resources, we can ensure MWBEs have the opportunity not just to compete—but to thrive."

"As a legislator, I've seen firsthand that we cannot close the wealth gap without closing the opportunity gap," said **State Senator Lea Webb**. "The MWBE program under Article 15-A must be more than a checkbox. It must be empowered, expanded, and enforced so that minority- and women-owned businesses have a real seat at the table. Equity must be the foundation of our procurement processes and not the exception."

**Senator Cordell Cleare** praised the energy and impact of the day: "MWBE Advocacy Day was a tremendous success — it showed the strength and determination of our entrepreneurs. We must keep that momentum going and ensure MWBEs get the access and support they deserve."

**Senator Luis R. Sepúlveda** added, "Across my district and throughout New York, I've witnessed firsthand the extraordinary resilience, creativity, and determination of minority and women-owned businesses. These entrepreneurs don't just build businesses. They build communities,

create jobs, and drive progress in places too often overlooked. Yet despite their contributions, they still face barriers rooted in structural inequity. That's why days like this matter. Supporting and strengthening tools like 15-A is part of honoring the work they've already done and the future they're still building."

**Senator Jeremy Cooney**, a member of the Select Majority Task Force on Economic Inclusion, emphasized: "Supporting Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises means uplifting groups that have been underinvested in for years. As a member of the Select Majority Task Force, I'm proud to join my colleagues in calling for greater participation in our state contracting processes while we continue our efforts to bring more opportunities and greater equity to these businesses across our state."

As the legislative session continues, MWBE Advocacy Day served as a timely reminder that while progress has been made, more work remains. Senator Sanders and his colleagues remain committed to ensuring MWBEs are not only included but prioritized in New York State's economic future.

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