



## **District Hall Providence** **ACTIVATED BY Innovation Studio**

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### **DISTRICT HALL PROVIDENCE HOSTS VICE PRESIDENT HARRIS, COMMERCE SECRETARY RAIMONDO FOR WOMEN-LED BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE**

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (May 5, 2021): District Hall Providence was the host site today for U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo to lead a business roundtable discussion with women entrepreneurs.

The Vice President and Commerce Secretary traveled to Rhode Island to meet with Congressional leaders and small business owners. The main focus of their high-profile visit was to present key elements of President Biden's proposed American Jobs Plan, chief among them being infrastructure improvements, job training, health care and child care investment.

Against a backdrop of American flags and a newly commissioned mural depicting the Capitol City, VP Harris and Secretary Raimondo sat at a U-shaped table with five entrepreneurs from around the state who described their business successes and challenges as a cadre of national reporters listened in. A handful of invited guests were allowed into the event space, including District Hall/Venture Café Executive Director Tuni Schartner, under the watchful eyes of Secret Service personnel.

"When Commerce Secretary Raimondo was our state governor, she built a connective, supportive infrastructure for small business, so it's like coming back full circle. Our District Hall space and signature Venture Café programming are a direct result of her economic development strategy," states Ms. Schartner. "We are the gateway to the innovation and design district, housed in the very first building to be built on the Wexford Innovation Campus under her leadership."

District Hall/Venture Café continues to partner with the State of Rhode Island to execute the [R.I. Small Business Support Program](#) of workshops led by expert advisors, many of whom are small and mid-sized business owners themselves. During the pandemic, the program helped over 1,000 small businesses to survive and thrive. "Some of the women-led business owners who took part in today's roundtable discussion were

featured in our programming in the past, sharing their story, creating awareness for their products and services, and helping other entrepreneurs in their own journey,” added Ms. Schartner.

The mural drawn on the whiteboard wall in District Hall was created by The Avenue Concept’s YSANEL, a talented Afro-Caribbean artist from the South Side of Providence. Using dry erase markers as her medium, she depicted the city skyline, the Capitol building and state flag symbol of “Hope.” Schartner notes, “We were so pleased to recommend our community partner, The Avenue Concept, to create this colorful piece. What I love most about it is the connectedness of the buildings in her drawing. The artist really grasped the concept of what we do here in our organization -- we connect anyone with a business or idea with resources and programs they need to grow. It’s our mission and purpose, as well as my passion.”

District Hall is part of a regional nonprofit organization called [Innovation Studio](#), based in Roxbury, Massachusetts. The organization operates Venture Café programs in Providence and Cambridge, as well as District Hall Boston in the Seaport and the Roxbury Innovation Center.

“Our work aligns with everything about supporting small business,” comments Daniel Enriquez Vidana, president of Innovation Studio and a member of its Board of Directors. “This sector is so vital to the economy, as our local and national leaders have come to realize, particularly during the pandemic when many businesses shut their doors and people found themselves out of work. We seek economic mobility for all, a world in which anyone can be an innovator. Hosting the Vice President at our District Hall Providence event has put our important mission into the national spotlight during Small Business Week, and we are very grateful for that.”

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*Established in 2019, District Hall Providence is a home for innovators and entrepreneurs offering collaboration programs and free coworking spaces. Located in Providence’s new innovation district in the Wexford Innovation Center, it houses weekly Venture Café programming on Thursdays (a hybrid gathering of virtual and in-person) as a hub of activity for startups and entrepreneurs. District Hall/Venture Café’s parent organization is Innovation Studio, a 501c3 nonprofit founded in 2011 as Venture Café Foundation in Roxbury, Mass. whose “economic mobility for all” mission is to increase access to entrepreneurship by building strong, inclusive, accessible and innovative communities. The organization is dedicated to helping anyone successfully launch and grow a business, connecting small businesses, startups and entrepreneurs to the community visionaries, researchers, corporations, funders, and the market. Innovation Studio continues its longstanding partnership with its founding partner, Cambridge Innovation Center. District Hall Providence is located at 225 Dyer Street in Providence, R.I.; [www.DistrictHallProvidence.org](http://www.DistrictHallProvidence.org); (857) 254-1857.*