I'm Juan Rivero speaking on behalf of Village Preservation, a neighborhood historic preservation non-profit. One of our main areas of concern has been the preservation of longstanding businesses that have become institutions in their communities. We run a number of programs that invite people to nominate such businesses for special recognition by our organization. And, sadly, a good percentage of those nominated have, after decades of operation, shut down, before we even get to them. For this reason, we have been staunch supporters of the Small Business Jobs Survival Act and of formula retail zoning restrictions aimed at protecting independent businesses. It's not surprising, then, that we look favorably upon Int. 197 as a complement to such measures.

We wanted, however, to bring a few concerns to your attention:
- The first is the nomination process. Given that the importance of these businesses to their communities is at the heart of this initiative, it would make sense that nominations for inclusion in the registry begin with them, rather than with elected officials. This would help limit the politicization of the process and engage communities beyond their proposed current role as consultants after the fact.

- Second, there's the amount of the grant, which I want to put in perspective with an actual example. A 30 year-old, two-employee business in one of our neighborhoods recently lost its lease after a failed negotiation. It's shutting down at the end of the month. It used to pay $8k/month for 500 square feet. The proposed renewal imposed, along with some onerous conditions, a "preferential" increase of 25%, or $10k/month. The two proposed grants would, combined, have covered about 10% of this rent increase, almost $200 out of $2k. Not nothing; but not necessarily a difference maker.

- Third, the proposal, as formulated, premises the landlord grant upon a risk of displacement determination. This could, in theory, incentivize a landlord to threaten displacement in order to qualify for the grant. By the same perverse logic, the grant to the tenant offers the landlord room to increase rent by the amount of the grant, thereby undermining the goal of the program.
All that said, we feel that the retention of legacy businesses is a crucial issue, we support the spirit of intro 197 and hope that the foregoing concerns are addressed and that this bill is complemented with long overdue major initiatives like the Small Business Jobs Survival Act. Thank you for your attention to this matter.