

RECOMMENDATION FOR PROMOTION

From: Michael Cochran, Sole Member The Cochran Block, LLC 7452 School Avenue, Dundalk, Maryland 21222 mcochran@cochranblock.org · cochranblock.org CAGE 1CQ66 · UEI W7X3HAQL9CF9 · SAM.gov Active

To: Administrator, U.S. Small Business Administration **Cc:** Associate Administrator, Office of Veterans Business Development Director, VetCert Program

Re: Unconditional recommendation for the promotion of Melissa, SBA VetCert case reviewer (direct line 202-798-2061), relating to Application 86682

Date: April 14, 2026

Dear Administrator:

I am writing to formally commend and recommend for promotion a member of your SBA VetCert review staff, who identifies herself in correspondence only as Melissa and who provided her direct line as **202-798-2061**. Melissa was assigned to review my Service-Disabled Veteran-Owned Small Business certification application, **Application 86682**, filed under The Cochran Block, LLC.

On April 14, 2026, I received from Melissa a correction notice on Application 86682 listing five (5) specific issues that required resolution prior to resubmission. This recommendation is based on the quality of that correction notice and stands independently of the outcome of the application itself. Whether my application is ultimately accepted or rejected is immaterial to my assessment of her performance.

What Melissa did well

1. The correction notice was complete, not vague. Each of the five items was identified with a specific "reason" category (Other, Articles of Incorporation/Organization, Incorrect Firm Type, Operating Agreement, Other-procedural). No hand-waving. No "please review your submission for completeness." Five precise items, each actionable.

2. Each item had an explanation AND a specific remediation path. For example, the firm-type correction did not simply say "fix your entity type." It walked through an eight-step procedural sequence for navigating the VetCert portal to correct the Business Structure field — explicit instructions on which menu, which pencil icon, what save button, what to re-enter after the change, and a final verification step. This is the difference between a reviewer who tells you what to do and a reviewer who shows you exactly how to do it. Small businesses run by single-owner veterans do not typically have legal staff, compliance

officers, or application specialists. Melissa's walkthrough saved me approximately two hours of confusion that I would otherwise have had to burn on support calls.

3. She provided a direct line. 202-798-2061 — a real phone number, identified as hers personally, not a queue. That is accountability. It implicitly says: *if something in my notice is unclear, call me, and I will own the answer*. Federal agency staff who publish a direct line at the individual level are rarer than they should be.

4. Procedural clarity on the resubmission mechanism. Her notice explicitly stated the correct remediation path: do not respond by email or in-system messaging, upload required documents to the application's Document Upload page, reach the Sign page, verify submission success. She explicitly named the failure mode ("Failure to re-submit your application within 30 days of this request will result in auto-closure") — no ambiguity about the clock, no hedging about the consequence. Clear rules produce fast, clean compliance.

5. Professional tone without bureaucratic rigidity. The correction notice closed with "If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me" — a courtesy many government correspondence rounds skip entirely. She then followed with the agency-level help desk number and the SBA resource library URL for applicants who need broader support. Belt and suspenders. Good ops.

6. The notice served its stated purpose. Within hours of receiving her correction list, I had identified my existing Articles of Organization PDF in my own archive (previously filed with the Maryland Department of Assessments and Taxation, Document #2345892), drafted and signed a 25-page Operating Agreement meeting her stated requirements, and prepared the remaining three procedural corrections. The fix path was operational, not theoretical. A correction notice that produces a fix is a correction notice that worked.

Why this is worth your attention

Small-business federal contracting is, for most applicants, an opaque and frustrating process. The asymmetry between large primes (who have dedicated compliance teams) and solo veterans (who typically have one person working nights and weekends between billable hours) is severe. The quality of individual reviewers at certification agencies is the single largest variable in whether small applicants succeed or self-select out.

Melissa's correction notice was, in my operational assessment, the precise work that a promotable case reviewer produces. It was complete, specific, procedurally clear, time-bounded, and produced an actionable fix on the receiving end. It respected my time. It respected my ability to execute given adequate instructions. It did not padding itself with unnecessary caveats, disclaimers, or bureaucratic throat-clearing. It was, in short, P12-grade work — if I may borrow a term from my own company's internal protocols that prohibit AI-slop language and bureaucratic filler.

I do not know Melissa's surname, her tenure, her GS level, or her promotion pipeline status. I do know that she is currently performing the work competently, efficiently, and with applicant-respecting

professionalism. Whatever mechanism exists at the SBA for recognizing and advancing staff who are doing the job at this level, I respectfully request that mechanism be applied to her record.

This recommendation is **unconditional**. It stands regardless of whether Application 86682 is ultimately accepted, rejected, or closed. The quality of Melissa's review is not contingent on my application's outcome, and my recommendation for her promotion should not be either. If I resubmit and am denied certification on a substantive ground unrelated to the correction notice, this recommendation remains in force. If I am approved, same. It is observational and separable.

Public record

This recommendation is being published at **cochranblock.org/recommendation-melissa** as a permanent public-record governance transparency artifact under Article XXIII of the Operating Agreement of The Cochran Block, LLC, which instrument is itself publicly available at cochranblock.org/operations.

Publishing this letter publicly does two things: (1) it prevents any appearance that my recommendation is contingent on my application outcome, since the record exists regardless; and (2) it serves as one small example of how a solo-veteran-owned small business, having received fair treatment from a specific federal agency reviewer, can document that fact in a way that is independently auditable and cannot quietly disappear from anyone's performance file.

Respectfully,

/s/ Michael Cochran

Michael Cochran Sole Member, The Cochran Block, LLC Veteran, United States Army (17C Cyber Operations, JCAC 2014) Dundalk, Maryland April 14, 2026

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