

To: Chair Keny-Guyer, members of the House committee on Human Services and Housing

Re: Testimony for support for HB 2508

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice Chairs Sanchez and Noble, and members of the committee,

I want to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 2508.

My name is Lee Po Cha, and I am the Executive Director at the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization. Every single day, I go to work at an organization that employs hundreds of immigrants and refugees with stories just like mine.

It's a common story. Currently, 25.4 million people around the world are refugees. They are people who have had to flee their countries due to persecution of race, religion, nationality, political dissidence, or membership to a particular group. Less than 1% of the world's refugees are ever resettled.

I am blessed and privileged to be a part of that 1%. And I know that being part of that 1% comes with a responsibility and duty to support new arrivals each day.

The struggles aren't over for a refugee that makes it out of a camp.

When you arrive in the U.S. as a refugee, you're faced with an entirely new set of problems; where to live, how to navigate, how to speak, where to go, how to find work, how to raise your kids, how to put food on the table, how to practice your culture, how to remember your culture, how to avoid victimization, how to protect yourself.

IRCO programs address these needs. In 2019, our refugee employment services team helped 90% of our refugee community members find full-time jobs. Our pre-employment training classes do so much more than just teach English. Our teachers give lessons on navigating TriMet, how to respond in an emergency, and how to manage currency.

Refugees come to the United States with a wealth of skills, knowledge and experiences. They are an integral part of our society and we cannot afford to cast them aside.

HB 2508 would make it clear that Oregon's policy not only welcomes refugees, but makes them valued and contributing members of society.

I encourage you to support HB 2508 today. In 2019, let us put our best foot forward for those who have walked miles and traveled oceans to call this place home.