

**Kate Brown**  
Governor



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Senate Committee on Business and General Government  
Testimony in support of SB 855  
March 19, 2019, 8:30am, Hearing Room B

Chair Riley, Vice-Chair Girod, Senators Dembrow, Hass and Olsen:

The Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs (OCAPIA) and Oregon Commission on Hispanic Affairs (OCHA) have long standing interests in growing Oregon's diverse professional workforce. It is essential that Oregonians benefit from the inclusion of licensed and credentialed service providers from all communities, including new Oregonians. Thank you for the opportunity to support this important and inclusive bill.

Currently, an immigrant arriving in Oregon with professional credentials from their home country is required to navigate the complex path of Oregon's licensing boards themselves, creating difficulties for new Oregonians who are not proficient in English. SB 855 would take steps to address this, and increase the number of professionals who can provide services to their communities in their own languages, and also assist these professionals in achieving financial success. OCAPIA has conducted research since 2016 on the pathways to licensure in Oregon, in partnership with Partners in Diversity, and heard stories first-hand from immigrant doctors, nurses, pharmacists and engineers who are still struggling navigating the pathways to licensure, or other ways to bring their skillset into the Oregon workforce, often in fields that have shortages of workers, but after much effort became janitors and taxi drivers to make ends meet for their families. This kind of under-employment is common among Oregon's skilled immigrant and refugee workforce made up of highly skilled physicians, pharmacists, nurses, clinicians, technicians, dentists, therapists, and psychiatrists to name a few.

Underemployment takes a toll on society economically and socially. It limits tax revenue to federal, state, and local governments, and results in real economic losses when skills go unused. Conservative estimates of U.S. federal annual tax dollars forgone due to the underemployment of skilled immigrants exceeds \$10 billion, while Oregon state misses more than \$27 million annually.<sup>1</sup> Underemployment also limits a family's spending power, which effects their participation in the local economy. It is estimated that Oregon's loss exceeds \$272 million in terms of spending power missed due to underemployment of skilled immigrants.<sup>2</sup>

We urge you to vote yes on SB 855, to improve pathways to licensure for highly skilled immigrants.

Sincerely,

Chanpone Sinlapasai-Okamura, OCAPIA Chair

Irma Linda Castillo, OCHA Chair

**OR Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs**

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Legislative members:  
Senator Michael Dembrow  
Representative Carla Piluso

**OR Commission on Black Affairs**

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<sup>1</sup> Soto, A.R., Batalova, J., & Fix, M. (2017). *The Costs of Brain Waste among Highly Skilled Immigrants in Oregon*. Migration Policy Institute.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.