

Kate Brown
Governor



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Senate Committee on Business and General Government
Testimony in Support of SB 856
March 19, 2019

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

The Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islanders (OCAPIA), in its role of advocate for equitable public policy for underrepresented communities statewide, strongly supports SB 856. For the past three years OCAPIA has worked collaboratively with the Oregon Commissions on Black Affairs and Hispanic Affairs, Partners in Diversity, HECC, Licensing Boards, business, and refugee/immigrant resettlement agencies to study national models of best practice bringing their talents into the workforce effectively and efficiently. SB 856 is such a bill, creating a central place to empower and provide assistance to immigrants as they and their families build success, self-sufficiency, achieve citizenship, start businesses, pursue their careers and educations and myriad details, navigating new, often confusing, systems.

SB 856 will establish an Oregon Office of New Americans to serve as a central resource for welcoming and orienting immigrants coming to Oregon helping them access the opportunities they need for success. Many immigrants and refugees come to Oregon with advanced degrees and skills in health care, business, tech and other fields, but end up in low paying jobs because the road to achieving licensure in their fields can be very challenging and confusing. To address this, the Office for New Americans would also include a collaborative, convening hub, focused on working with partners in government, nonprofit, legal, education, licensing board, and job/business partners to make re-credentialing for skilled immigrants and refugees a coordinated effort, with smooth transitions from higher education, to credentialing, to working in their fields of expertise.

The Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs and the Advocacy Commissions believe that helping policy makers find efficient, effective ways to bring under represented communities including immigrants and refugees fully into the Oregon economy is the surest path to success for any family. Oregon's newest Americans represent vital, promising segments of the workforce, and emerging leaders striving for the better life they seek for themselves and their families. Modest investment here, we believe based on our work nationally and with local partners, will build short and long term success for generations of new Oregonians.

Thank you for your positive consideration and investment for SB 856.

Chanpone Sinlapasai-Okamura,
Chair, Oregon Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

OR Commission on Asian and Pacific Islander Affairs

Chanpone Sinlapasai-Okamura,
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