



IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

BUILDING NEW BEGINNINGS

10301 NE Glisan Street

Portland, Oregon 97220

www.irco.org

MAIN OFFICE

AFRICA HOUSE

**GREATER MIDDLE
EAST CENTER**

**PACIFIC ISLANDER &
ASIAN FAMILY CENTER**

**SLAVIC & EASTERN
EUROPEAN CENTER**

IRCO EASTERN OREGON

February 28, 2023

Co-Chairs Sollman and Evans, and Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means Subcommittee on Public Safety,

Re: \$16 Million in the Department of Justice Crime Victim and Survivor Services Division Budget (SB 5514) for:

- **\$10 Million to the Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund (HB 2933) for confidential safety and support services**
- **\$6 Million to the Survivor Housing Fund (HB 3018) for housing assistance for survivors**

The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization's (IRCO) Survivor Services program launched in 1998 after a group of immigrant and refugee women convened to challenge domestic violence in their communities. Our team addresses the complex needs of Oregon's immigrant and refugee survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking. Last year alone 950 survivors at IRCO were provided with a range of culturally specific and trauma informed DVSA services.

Our program benefits from the support of the ODSVS and SHF funds; these funds help IRCO provide direct, culturally specific, and community-based services for immigrant and refugee survivors. Newcomers seeking help at IRCO often lack immigration documentation, with their abuser threatening to "report them to ICE." Survivors may lack credit, rental, or employment history in the US and hesitate to seek help due to language barriers, persistent cultural stigmas, and other systemic barriers. They may carry mental and physical trauma experienced when fleeing war and persecution. Some hold the perception—often from past negative experiences from their home countries—that law enforcement will not protect them, and they fear abuser and community retaliation.

The Oregon Domestic and Sexual Violence Services Fund (ODSVS) is vital for immigrant and refugee survivors in Oregon (HB 2933). Through ODSVS, we were able to support over 15 clients actively fleeing violence with emergency shelter/motels. We provided emergency food for 25 survivors and their families, as well as medicine and household, cleaning, and hygiene supplies for 4. IRCO Advocates use ODSVS funding to help clients develop a safety plan, which promotes active steps to prevent a crisis and/or relieve depressive symptoms. Many survivors served with funds from this bill have been immigrants or refugees who were

uncomfortable or unfamiliar with mainstream services and greatly benefitted from the culturally and linguistically specific services our Advocates provide. With additional funding we can increase outreach and support to underserved communities where survivors often fall through the gaps.

Survivor Housing Funds (SHF) provides stability for immigrant and refugee survivors (HB 3018). SHF funding helps participants escape from their abusers, pay off debts, retain new housing, gain employment, and plan for long term stability. The empowerment, opportunity, and support participants receive has been invaluable to our community. 14 survivors and families were provided essential financial assistance through the SHF program in the form of rent, deposits, utilities, etc. to maintain their current housing or access new housing. Over 75% of survivors assisted through SHF reported that they felt more hopeful about the future, while others noted that they feel better off than they did prior to receiving housing assistance. With a growing waitlist for housing services, we know these funds are essential to fill in desperate housing needs our clients face.

Continual funding through reliable local funds like SHF and ODSVS provides stability to communities that face constant uncertainty and help meet the high need for diverse safety services. Thank you for your work and we urge you to support the \$10 million increase in ODSVS funds and a continuation of \$6 million in Survivor Housing Funds in the CVSSD Budget.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'LP Cha', written in a cursive style.

Lee Po Cha, Executive Director