

Testimony on Senate Bill 1518-Senate Committee on Veterans, Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Thatcher and Committee members,

My name is Eldon Alik and I am a Marshallese citizen and I strongly support SB 1518, the COFA Safety Net bill. A little bit about myself. I am a military veteran having served in the US military. After 11 years working for the Oregonian I started my own window cleaning business in Portland, Oregon, employing as many as 21 of my Marshallese countrymen. It was difficult to leave this business but when I was urged to apply for the Consul General post for my country I couldn't refuse. The Consul General's job is to help serve the community negotiate the many health, legal, and immigration issues that they face in America. I served as the Consul General in Springdale Arkansas for 6 years and am now working as a consulting contractor for the university of Arkansas Medical School, gathering health status statistics on the Marshallese populations. I currently reside in my home in Tigard, Oregon.

Now to the bill. I believe that SB 1518 is long overdue and I believe if the spirit of the treaty we have with the US had been fully honored we would have no need for remedial legislation. However, Oregon has become a beacon for the rest of the country having passed many COFA bills restoring pieces, bill by bill, over the last 10 years of what we once had prior to the Welfare reform Act of 1996. SB 1518 I believe gets to the core of the restoration process by saying that COFA citizens cannot be denied any social service benefits that Oregonians receive, including SNAP and Disability coverage. My people are worthy of equal treatment while serving in the military, working, studying, and living in America. Some of our finest Atolls are unsafe to return to because of the 67 nuclear detonations. Our people have continued to pay a heavy price in high rates of cancer due to the high levels of radiation. In fact I just returned from two funerals of my countrymen and while serving as Consul General I must have attended 100 during the 6 years I was there.

So, in closing let me say how important this bill is to my people and I believe it will serve to finally restore the spirit of the Compact of Free Association treaty not just in Oregon but throughout the United States.

So Kimmol tata to this Veterans Committee on Emergency Management, Federal and World Affairs, and the entire Oregon legislature for paving the way back for us. I will be happy to answer any questions.

Eldon Alik  
Former Consul General of the Marshall Islands.  
eldonalik@gmail.com