

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 442

Chair Patterson, Vice Chair Hayden, and Members of the Committee,

I come before you today as someone who has called Oregon home for 12 years and now serves as a Senator and Presidential Envoy for Nuclear Justice and Human Rights for the Marshall Islands. I am also the co-founder of the COFA Alliance National Network which serves the good contributing citizens from the COFA nations residing there in Oregon. I am here to urge your support for Senate Bill 442. This bill is not just about policy—it is about upholding our nations shared commitments and ensuring that ALL good citizens, including the COFA nationals, in Oregon have access to the essential services they need to thrive in the community.

The Republic of the Marshall Islands, alongside the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau, has maintained a unique and historic relationship with the United States under the Compact of Free Association. Under this agreement, COFA citizens can live and work in the United States and access public safety net benefits under a status called “non-immigrants.” In return, the U.S. retains exclusive military and defense rights in our region, including strategic access to the Pacific and the continued operation of the missile defense test site at Kwajalein Atoll. Our nations have long stood together in partnership, reinforcing security and stability for us both.

Beyond strategic interests, the U.S. also has a profound moral responsibility to COFA nations—particularly the Marshall Islands. From 1946 to 1958, the U.S. conducted 67 nuclear tests in our islands, leaving lasting health, environmental, and displacement challenges that continue to affect our people today. Many Marshallese have relocated to the U.S., including Oregon, in search of healthcare, education, and economic opportunity. Oregon is home to one of the largest COFA populations in the United States. Yet, despite their contributions to the beautiful State of Oregon, they continue to face barriers to essential services, including access to healthcare, dental care and housing. Establishing the COFA Shared Services Office will help bridge these gaps by providing essential and cultural support for accessing critical resources. Under the renewed and amended Compact of Free Association 2023, the Federal Government has extended and restored all public benefit services to eligible residents from the COFA nations, including TANF, SNAP, SSI, Medicaid, etc.

The Marshall Islands knows firsthand the importance of strong partnerships and human rights advocacy in caring for our people. As a nation serving on the United Nations Human Rights Council, we continue to advocate for nuclear justice on the international stage. Just as we work to ensure global accountability for the harms caused to the

Marshallese people, we call upon Oregon's leadership to take action at the state level by passing SB 442.

Now is the time to act—our COFA neighbors cannot wait any longer for the support they need and deserve. Passing SB 442 is a step toward ensuring that COFA citizens in Oregon receive the services they need. This legislation is an opportunity for Oregon to honor both the historic partnership with COFA nations and the ongoing contributions of our people residing in Oregon State.

Thank you and Kommol tata for your time!

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