

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee,

My name is Calvin Taylor. I am an electrical engineer, amateur musician, and member of Murray Hills Christian Church. Most importantly, I'm a father. I am writing to advocate for the passage of SB 194, the "Oregon's New Neighbors Coordinated Access Act", because it will make our communities better. It will make *us* better. Let me explain:

Many years ago, my pastor at the time asked me if I'd help him and another member of the congregation—they'd committed to supporting a refugee family, and both were going to be out of town for about two weeks. Could I provide a place for the family to stay...just for maybe 10 days?

Reluctantly, I agreed. Reluctantly because my wife and I had just recently adopted a little girl from China, and (despite my best efforts) she appeared to have significant delays. We were scrambling—going to doctors, getting her evaluated, trying to figure out what was wrong, and what, if anything, we could do about it. The last thing we needed was a refugee family of four living with us!

Mohammed, Sadia, and their two little boys, Ahmed and Abdifatah arrived in Portland from a Kenyan refugee camp with nothing—even the clothing on their backs was donated. They are Bantu, victims of the disaster in Somalia. Mohammed spoke English with a thick accent. Sadia barely spoke English at all. Abdi was just a baby, but Ahmed was a sturdy little three year old who got into everything!

After an awkward couple weeks, I helped them get settled into an apartment. A cruddy little miserable place. That was the deal—I was done! Mission accomplished. When Mohamed turned on the water in the kitchen, in that cruddy little apartment, he and Sadia started talking a million miles an hour in Maay Maay. See, in the Kenyan refugee camp, all the resources, including water, were controlled by more powerful tribes—Somali, not Bantu. If Mohamed went to get water, he risked getting beaten or killed. If Sadia went instead, she risked getting raped. So they were forced to send little Ahmed to get water for them to drink and cook with. A cruddy little apartment with running water was like a miracle from God to them.

That's when I decided I wasn't done. I reasoned that you can make it here, with a job and a car. Going back to my church, I told them that we were done when Mohamed had both.

It took three years. I taught him to drive. He tried, unsuccessfully, to teach me how to be good at soccer. We became friends. Despite having only a couple months of formal schooling, Mohamed is one of the smartest people I know. Fluent in four languages, he absorbed information like a sponge!

He landed a job at Epson, refurbishing printer cartridges. Sadia started a daycare. Their daughter was born in the back seat of my wife's car. Despite different religious and cultural backgrounds, Mohammed and I, two young fathers, found that we had a lot in common. But, over time, we connected less...and less. Then he moved and I lost contact.

Okay...so, great story, right? I did the little bit extra to help out Mohammed and his family. But so what? How does that help Oregon?

Here's the kicker:

Ten years go by. My daughter is diagnosed with intellectual disability. The thing she loves best is cheerleading, and she's in a special needs cheer team called "Inspire." It's a challenge for the coaches—there are kids with all sorts of disabilities and behavioral issues. But it is the BEST THING. When they perform, it's usually standing ovations all around.

I get a call out of nowhere from Mohammed. He had to go to the hospital. Chest pains. It turned out to be a false alarm, but, when they went to confirm his emergency contact...it turned out to be me.

We reconnected at a pizza parlor. Mohammed, Sadia, and their (now) six kids! It was...it was a good time! 😊 Ahmed, now a teenager, introduced himself. A smart, confident, athletic kid, a friend had gotten him involved in cheerleading in high school. Hearing about ODT, he visited the gym. He had no money to join, but the gym owner said that she'd wave the fees, if he'd help out—staff the front desk...help coach. And so Ahmed became one of the coaches of "Inspire," my daughter's cheer team. He's really good. Because of his patience and good humor, he gets given the "difficult" kids to work with.

Ahmed is still figuring himself out. He's trying to decide if he wants to be a teacher, or get involved in media production, or marketing, or something else. What is clear is that he's a very talented young man...and he's already demonstrated his value to our community.

Now I don't know how much credit I can take...Ahmed, I think, would have become a remarkable person either way. But when he told me that I inspired him...that he grew up with stories about how his family had been helped out when they were strangers...that he wanted, more than anything to help others. Well.

That's what you have an opportunity to vote for, in SB 194.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,

Calvin Taylor  
Principal Electrical Engineer  
Warn Industries