



IMMIGRANT & REFUGEE
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

BUILDING NEW BEGINNINGS

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MAIN OFFICE

AFRICA HOUSE

EASTERN OREGON

GREATER MIDDLE EAST
CENTER

PACIFIC ISLANDER &
ASIAN FAMILY CENTER

SLAVIC AND EASTERN
EUROPEAN CENTER

April 22, 2025

Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Oregon State Capitol
900 Court St NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Lieber and Sanchez,

On behalf of The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), I am writing in support of the University of Oregon's request for \$53.25 million in state bonding to construct a Child Behavioral Health Building to expand access to care and strengthen Oregon's behavioral health workforce.

Oregon ranks 49th nationally in Mental Health America's 2024 Youth Ranking, reflecting both the high rates of behavioral health challenges among adolescents and the limited availability of timely, effective care. These challenges affect children and families in both rural and urban communities across the state.

Reversing this trend requires strategic investment in both behavioral health service delivery and the education and training infrastructure needed to expand the workforce. The Child Behavioral Health Building is uniquely positioned to address both.

This 54,000-square-foot facility on the UO Portland campus will:

- Expand access to free, evidence-based behavioral health services for youth and families.
- Reach rural and underserved communities through a new telehealth center.
- Train a diverse new workforce of behavioral health professionals equipped to serve in schools, clinics, and community settings.
- Support research and innovation to improve outcomes and strengthen care systems across the state.

By combining clinical services, workforce training, and applied research, the facility supports a comprehensive approach to addressing Oregon's youth behavioral health needs.

The building will house the Ballmer Institute for Children's Behavioral Health, which offers a first-of-its-kind undergraduate program focused on preparing students to identify and address behavioral health challenges early, and the Prevention Science Institute, which conducts research to develop effective behavioral health interventions and partners with schools and communities to put them into practice. Bringing these two institutes together under one roof will align workforce preparation with applied research and service delivery, strengthening the pipeline from classroom to care and expanding support for children and families across Oregon.

Founded in 1976 by refugees for refugees, IRCO has been serving Oregon's immigrant and refugee communities for nearly 50 years and sees first-hand the urgent need for culturally appropriate, accessible behavioral health services for youth and families. The communities we serve have expressed a need for behavioral health support, but the number of providers is limited, and waitlists for services can be months-long, leaving youth/families without these critical services.

We respectfully urge you to prioritize funding for this high-impact, forward-looking investment in children, families, and the state's behavioral health infrastructure. Oregon's youth deserve access to the care they need, and this project will help ensure they receive it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'LP Cha', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Lee Po Cha
Executive Director
The Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization