



IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

MISSION:

TO PROMOTE THE INTEGRATION OF
REFUGEES, IMMIGRANTS, AND THE
COMMUNITY AT LARGE INTO A SELF-
SUFFICIENT, HEALTHY, AND INCLUSIVE
MULTIETHNIC SOCIETY.

IRCO Headquarters
10301 NE Glisan Street
Portland, OR 97220
Tel: 503-234-1541
www.irco.org

Dear Chair Riley, Vice-Chair Giroud, and Senators Dembrow, Hass, and Olsen:

I'd like to thank the committee for the opportunity to testify today in support of the Senate Bill 855. My name is Sarah Delaney and I work for the Immigrant Refugee Community Organization (IRCO) in Refugee Career Pathways, a 3-year program funded by the Office of Resettlement. Through this grant we provide career coaching, job application help, connections to occupational trainings and networking, re-credentialing and licensing assistance to individuals with refugee and asylee granted status. Before I talk about this bill, I'd like to tell you about my clients. However, I'm not going to talk about them using the words refugee or asylee, as those are merely labels they were given based on circumstances they never asked for. Instead, I'm going to talk about their accomplishments; their years of education and training that informed their lives before displacement and continue to shape the professional identifies they carry with them as they seek to build a new beginning here in Oregon.

These are the professionals I have the privilege of working with every day:

- A computer programmer from Jordan who built her own cybersecurity software system as part of her Master's thesis. She's now a caretaker.
- A former Science teacher with a bachelor's degree in environmental sciences from Rwanda. He works at the airport loading luggage
- A physician from Afghanistan with 20 years of experience in Obstetrics/Gynecology, and 5 years leading Gender-Based Violence trainings with international leaders. She is unemployed but continues to job search while she volunteers at a hospital.
- An Electro mechanical engineer from Afghanistan and a Dentist from Egypt with 12 years of experience as a Maxillofacial surgeon. They are both driving Uber.
- And finally, a Field Botanist from Eritrea. When he enrolled in our program, he knew how to turn an inedible plant species into grain, but he did not know how to write a cover letter. He worked at a gas station for two years, and almost become homeless. Through our program he received job search and application assistance, as well as interview coaching. With this support he applied for and received a research job at a University out of state. While we are pleased that he has found a career-track position in his field, I'd like to see more professionals like him find meaningful work in Oregon.

These individuals are just a few of the 15,000 immigrants and refugees with advanced degrees who are either under or unemployed in the state of Oregon, as



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reported by the Portland Business Alliance (PBA). The PBA also reports that this results in a lost annual income of \$272.5 Million, and \$27.2 Million in income tax loss for Oregon.

Despite the number of highly-skilled and qualified newcomers, there are significant barriers to re-credentialing and licensing. These include costly exam fees, lack of transparency in requirements, and years of additional training. Keep in mind that a foreign degree disqualifies you from receiving Federal Student Aid, yet many licensing boards still require foreign degree holders to obtain additional education in the United States as part of the re-credentialing process, even after evaluation.

This bill alone will not change these requirements, and it won't remove all the barriers. But it provides a pathway through which advanced professionals, like my clients, have at least a chance to demonstrate their proficiency. However, in addition to passing legislation, we must also offer more programs like IRCO's Refugee Career Pathways that assist newcomers in navigating these complex and often exclusionary systems.

In closing I'd like to thank Senator Dembrow for introducing this bill, as well as Senator Manning Jr, Representatives Hernandez and Piluso for their sponsorship. This bill calls for a shift in mindset, one that we so desperately need in this current political moment. It supports the belief that newcomers are assets, not burdens, and that they possess unique skill sets and talents that enrich our community. As a state we must do more to both acknowledge their professional backgrounds and integrate their expertise into our workforce. And it starts with this bill.

Thank you for your time,

Sarah Delaney

Career Coach
Refugee Career Pathways
Immigrant Refugee Community Organization
sarahde@irco.org
503-914-7904