

Bill Denham  
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Dear Chair Bynum and members of the committee,

I write to you today as an ordinary citizen who is concerned about the nature of our nation and of our state. I believe neither is perfect and that both can be improved. I think HB 3265 will improve the lives of all Oregonians, even those who oppose the passage of this bill, even those who don't want any immigrants in our state or in our country.

I am a supporter of the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice and I believe we are all God's creatures and that we are all created equal—regardless of the circumstances or the geography of our birth. I believe we have a moral obligation to care for each other, again, regardless of the circumstances or the geography of our birth.

I want to share with you all a poem, a poem written by an immigrant to Great Brittan from Somalia. This may take some time to read. It is not a short poem but it is a deeply human poem that calls attention to why people become refugees, why people immigrate—why they leave their home.

#### Home

no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well  
your neighbors running faster than you  
breath bloody in their throats  
the boy you went to school with  
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory  
is holding a gun bigger than his body  
you only leave home  
when home won't let you stay  
no one leaves home unless home chases you  
fire under feet  
hot blood in your belly  
it's not something you ever thought of doing  
until the blade burnt threats into  
your neck  
and even then you carried the anthem under  
your breath  
only tearing up your passport in an airport toilets  
sobbing as each mouthful of paper  
made it clear that you wouldn't be going back.  
you have to understand,  
that no one puts their children in a boat  
unless the water is safer than the land  
no one burns their palms  
under trains  
beneath carriages  
no one spends days and nights in the stomach of a truck  
feeding on newspaper unless the miles travelled  
mean something more than journey.

no one crawls under fences  
no one wants to be beaten  
pitied  
no one chooses refugee camps  
or strip searches where your  
body is left aching  
or prison,  
because prison is safer  
than a city of fire  
and one prison guard  
in the night  
is better than a truckload  
of men who look like your father  
no one could take it  
no one could stomach it  
no one skin would be tough enough  
the  
go home blacks  
refugees  
dirty immigrants  
asylum seekers  
sucking our country dry  
niggers with their hands out  
they smell strange  
savage  
messed up their country and now they want  
to mess ours up  
how do the words  
the dirty looks  
roll off your backs  
maybe because the blow is softer  
than a limb torn off  
or the words are more tender  
than fourteen men between  
your legs  
or the insults are easier  
to swallow  
than rubble  
than bone  
than your child body  
in pieces.  
i want to go home,  
but home is the mouth of a shark  
home is the barrel of the gun  
and no one would leave home  
unless home chased you to the shore  
unless home told you  
to quicken your legs  
leave your clothes behind  
crawl through the desert  
wade through the oceans  
drown  
save  
be hunger  
beg  
forget pride  
your survival is more important  
no one leaves home until home is a sweaty voice in your ear

saying  
leave,  
run away from me now  
i don't know what i've become  
but i know that anywhere  
is safer than here

- Warsan Shire

I would urge each of you to hold on to this poem and to read it each evening, as a kind of devotional, before you go to sleep and read it again before you cast a vote on HB3265.

As you know, Oregon's sanctuary law is the oldest in our nation. As I'm sure you also already know that law enforcement agencies across the state have cooperated and continue to cooperate with ICE. This undermines the letter and the intention of the original law and sows fear and discord among immigrant communities and encourages a lack of acceptance of immigrants and actual hatred of immigrants among the broader community—every single one of whom comes from immigrant stock—even those whom we call First Peoples, who traveled here originally from Asia.

HB3265 is not perfect but it is a necessary step toward recognizing the humanity of each Oregonian and protecting the rights of each, whether a recent immigrant or a 10<sup>th</sup> generation immigrant. I urge you to vote to pass this bill out of committee and ultimately vote to make it the law, in our state.

Thank you,

Bill Denham