

Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2

March 23, 2021

To: Senate Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation  
From: Susheela Jayapal, Multnomah County Commissioner  
Date: Monday, March 29, 2021  
Re: Legislative Testimony on SB 778

I am the Multnomah County Commissioner for District 2, representing North, Northeast, and parts of East Portland.

I write in support of SB 778, which would create a state Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement.

I am an immigrant myself. I was born in India, and came to the U.S. when I was 16, to go to college. I know, from personal experience, the richness, diversity, and resilience of immigrant communities; the contributions they make to this state and to the lives of all Oregonians; and the barriers to advancement they face.

Those barriers include language, culture, negative experiences with the government in their home countries, and immigration status. And, as tragically illustrated in the past weeks, those barriers also include racism and xenophobia.

The very diversity that is our strength also makes it challenging to design systems and strategies that ensure the full participation of immigrant and refugee communities in the economic, social, and cultural life of our state.

The COVID pandemic laid bare these issues. At Multnomah County, we faced the challenge of reaching, designing systems of care for, and distributing essential resources to immigrant and refugee communities. These challenges were heightened during the pandemic, but they are ongoing issues that will remain once the pandemic ebbs and even as we return to uplifting our communities, rather than merely staunching harm.

Susheela Jayapal



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Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2

These issues must be addressed through systems and structural change. That is why I am advocating, at the county level, for analysis of and recommendations for that change -- such as the creation of a county office of immigrant and refugee affairs.

A state Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement would be of enormous benefit to local jurisdictions and community-based organizations working with immigrant and refugee communities. By providing a central point for data gathering and strategy development, this office would be a vital and necessary resource, improving and amplifying the work we do locally. It would also signal, in a tangible and productive way, our recognition of the importance and contributions of immigrant and refugee communities.

I urge support of SB 778, and thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susheela Jayapal", with a horizontal line underneath the signature.

Susheela Jayapal, Multnomah County Commissioner, District 2