

## Testimony in Support of HB 3230

My name is Theodora Lenihan, and I'm a Co-managing Immigration Attorney with IRCO. On behalf of IRCO, I submit this testimony in support of HB 3230.

Founded in 1976, IRCO is a culturally specific community-based organization providing leadership, advocacy, and direct services to immigrant and refugee communities. Our mission is to support our community members to become self-sufficient and integrated into our multi-ethnic society. Our staff speak 90+ languages and represent over 80+ cultural backgrounds that span amongst our diverse cultural programs including Africa House, Pacific Islander Asian Family Center, Mid-East House Project, and Slavic Center. Annually, we serve over 30,000+ community members each year through our 200+ programs providing direct services and support to community members.

In 2017, when changing national policies began to have an increasingly disparate impact on our communities, IRCO started our Immigration Legal Services (ILS) program because we recognized the increasing need for trauma informed and culturally responsive legal services to serve diverse populations that we serve who were being impacted. ILS supports with four main areas including: 1) legal representation on affirmative immigration applications such as green cards and citizenship, to stabilize individuals and families, 2) legal representation for people in deportation proceedings at Portland Immigration Court, 3) large scale clinics, such as Citizenship Day and Refugee Adjustment Day, for increased community reach and impact; and 4) providing community education (Know Your Rights) and outreach. Since our inception, ILS has provided representation and legal information to over 3,000 community members.

However, there is still a large, unmet need in the community for immigration legal services and wrap around supports. We, along with our partners, have never been able to meet the demand. **Currently, we must turn away two-thirds of those community members that come to us for immigration help. Our inability to help these people— many of whom are facing deportation and cannot afford the help they so desperately need – leads to the separation of family members.**

In light of a new administration with greater opportunities for the people we serve, we strongly support HB 3230. This investment would serve our most vulnerable communities in accessing crucial immigration services that would provide safety and security to people who have always been contributing members of our society and are on the front lines of the pandemic as essential workers for Oregon. This funding will help us build much needed capacity to help people seek lawful status in this country so that they can continue to support their families and secure a place in this state for themselves and their children.