

Testimony in Support of HB 4005

Lee Po Cha

February 2, 2022

Chair Power, Vice Chairs Reynolds and Zika, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 4005. My name is Lee Po Cha, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of IRCO, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization, which serves the holistic needs of Oregon's immigrants, refugees, and mainstream community members by providing equal and equitable opportunities to help build new beginnings.

We are writing to offer support for House Bill 4005. We see an immediate and ongoing need for culturally responsive childcare options for immigrant and refugee families in Oregon. Childcare provides the necessary infrastructure for Oregon's essential workforce to continue to work, and we have seen the devastating impact on employment when parents could not find childcare that they felt comfortable with for their children.

We have responded to that need. Since 2011, IRCO has helped 290 refugees complete our culturally responsive childcare training instruction, obtain technical assistance, and link to professional development opportunities; 204 refugees obtained their childcare licenses and established businesses. Unfortunately, to date, only our competitive federal discretionary grant has supported this program – and the program only serves refugees who have been in the U.S. for less than five years, so our immigrants and refugees who have lived here longer do not have access to this program. We have a wait list of interested participants since we can only serve 25 individuals each year. We have pushed for local funding streams to match our federal resources but have not yet been successful.

House Bill 4005 has the potential to fill in that gap. We are confident that this funding will have an impact. With our small project, we have created over 1,450 childcare slots by helping newcomers establish their businesses and provide culturally responsive childcare options. Our participants represent the increasingly diverse populations in Oregon – coming from Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Cuba, and Karen, Burmese, and Rohingya participants from Burma.

Without investing in new culturally responsive providers and helping existing culturally responsive providers expand, our communities cannot meet the increasing demands for childcare and address the socioeconomic disparities faced by our immigrant and refugee families. I thank you for your continued support for our communities and ask you to support the passage of House Bill 4005.

Sincerely,

Lee Po Cha

Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO)

