



February 28, 2023

To: Chair Kathleen Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and Members of the Committee
From: Mari Watanabe, Executive Director, Partners in Diversity
Re: Testimony in support of SB 849

Chair Taylor, Vice Chair Bonham, and members of the committee,

I am Mari Watanabe, executive director of Partners in Diversity (PID), an affiliate of the Portland Business Alliance (Alliance). I am here today to express strong support for Senate Bill 849 on behalf of PID and the Greater Portland Chamber of Commerce.

In 2017 the Alliance and Partners in Diversity commissioned a study in partnership with the Migration Policy Institute, to show, in hard numbers, the cost to Oregon in unrealized tax revenue and unrealized economic opportunity for immigrant and refugee communities, for not having pathways to work in their field of expertise. I have provided the committee with copies of the executive summary of this report, entitled “The Cost of Brain Waste among Highly Skilled Immigrants in Oregon.”

The report examined skill underutilization — also known as “brain waste”— and its economic costs in Oregon. Brain waste describes the situation when college graduates cannot fully utilize their skills and education in the workplace despite their high professional qualifications.

The report had five key findings but due to time, I will mention only two.

- The data showed that Oregon was home to 55,000 highly skilled immigrants with at least a bachelor’s degree.
- Low-skilled employment resulted in immigrant college graduates forgoing \$272.5 million in annual earnings. As a result, Oregon experienced \$27.7 million in forgone state and local tax revenue.

This data completely supports my personal experience as I regularly meet immigrants and refugees with degrees as medical doctors, pharmacists, psychiatrists, engineers, nurses, etc. They want to work in their skilled field but the lack of affordability and significant time commitment to go back to school to get the same degree in the U.S. is a very real barrier. One refugee with a medical doctorate degree asked me to please help him change the laws

as he has a head full of knowledge as a doctor and wanted to be able to utilize his skills here. Instead, he is working in a minimum wage job. There are many, many more stories like this.

SB 855 was supposed to begin to directly address these clear economic inequities by directing state professional licensure boards to develop pathways to licensure and certification for non-citizens. However, it is our perspective that little to no progress has been made since 2019. This is why we ask you to support SB 849. It adds accountability and timeline requirements that were missing from SB 855. SB 849 will create specific timelines and transparency requirements for licensure boards to follow, eliminate certain requirements that are not necessary, and, at a time when we are facing a shortage of health care professionals, mandates a pathway for individuals with advanced medical degrees to begin limited practice under supervision from licensed physicians while they seek full licensure. We also support the establishment of a grant program to provide career guidance and support services to internationally educated residents of Oregon who are seeking to enter the Oregon workforce in an eligible profession.

For these reasons I urge you to support SB 849. Thank you for your time.