



State Senator
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Sponsor Testimony
Senator Tina Maharath
Senate Resolution 237
Government Oversight and Reform Committee
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Good morning Chairman Coley, Ranking Member Craig, Vice Chair Huffman and members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee. Thank you for allowing me to present Senate Resolution 237, to honor June 20, 2020, as World Refugee Day.

As a society, we are in the midst of a global refugee crisis. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, there are more than 70 million forcibly displaced persons, including 26 million refugees worldwide; this is the highest level of displacement on record. Every two seconds, a person is forcibly displaced. Refugees face unspeakable conditions as they flee war and persecution and search for a better life for their family.

Since 2001, the United Nations General Assembly has recognized June 20 as World Refugee Day. Its purpose is to raise awareness of the difficult and oftentimes unimaginable situations that refugees face throughout the world. World Refugee Day also helps us to highlight the positive economic impact that refugees can have within our local communities. A 2015 report by Community Research Partners estimated that the central Ohio refugee community contributes \$1.6 billion to our economy annually and supports more than 21,000 jobs in the region.

I understand first-hand the unique challenges that refugees face. In 1990, my parents fled persecution in Laos for a better life in the United States. My father had served alongside American soldiers in the Laotian army, and my mother left behind a career as a nurse. They made these sacrifices because they knew that in this country, they could build a better life. Together, we faced the same difficulties as refugees everywhere, including language barriers, lack of transportation and social disconnection. Fortunately, school teachers, librarians and other members of my local community helped us acquire the skills needed to contribute.

Recognizing World Refugee Day will help us to live up to the ideals upon which our nation was founded. We must lead by example by welcoming all who come to us for assistance and by applauding the many people who have given their time and efforts to assist refugees in building a new life here in Ohio. Chairman Coley and members of the Committee, I appreciate your attention to this issue and I respectfully request your favorable consideration and passage of Senate Resolution 237. Thank you and I am happy to respond to questions you may have.