

**Leslie Mongin**

Mr. Chair Kennedy, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is Leslie Mongin, I am representing myself, and I am here to support SB 230.

I have spent 13 years of my career working with folks going through the refugee experience, four years of which I served at the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok, Thailand in the Refugee Coordinator's office. In that capacity, I was proud to uphold the traditions that our nation was founded on – including providing a safe haven for those persecuted on account of who they are, or what they believe.

As someone who played an integral part in the security vetting process of our refugee resettlement system, I can tell you that refugees are the most vetted immigrants to the United States. That process includes biographic and biometric security checks with Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, Department of State, National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI, and the intelligence community.

After refugees had gone through the multi-step, and often multi-YEAR process of applying for refugee status to the United States, and were conditionally approved, they would spend on average five days receiving “cultural orientation” on what to expect in the United States. These classes covered rights and responsibilities, understanding U.S. law and customs, and the importance of “early self-sufficiency” – being able to provide for yourself and your family as soon as possible.

At the end of these classes, I would often visit and see if folks had any additional questions. People would ask the different states they were heading for – Nebraska (lots corn), North Dakota (cold) – in the end, people would ask two questions: is it safe for me and my family, and how soon can I start working? And this eagerness to work bears out locally. In Colorado in 2016, refugee and immigrant populations contributed an estimated \$3.9 billion in taxes to the state.

Economic contributions is one measure. But what's perhaps more valuable, and yet harder to quantify, are the enduring and resilient qualities of the men, women, and children who have been through these experiences. The Iraqi man who had two bullets lodged in his back and worked 12 hour shifts at a Bangkok restaurant. The 5 year old orphaned Rohingya girl who love the color green. The Pakistani sisters who survived an acid attack.

I often knew what had happened, what had caused someone to flee from reading their case file. But when I would meet these same individuals in the community – as they provided counseling support to fellow refugees, or as kiddos playing with their friends, none of that showed. What did was their intent to get on with their lives, to see their kids in school, to work hard, to be safe, and to care for others.

I strongly encourage you to support SB 230 for all the reasons you have heard from myself and others today – the moral and humanitarian imperative, the economic benefit to Colorado, and the richness added to our thriving country.

I thank the committee members, and look forward to answering any questions you may have.