

Thank you Chair Hawj and members of the committee. Thank you Senator Mary Kunesch for carrying our bill. Thank you to Committee Administrator, Kara Josephson for placing our bill on the agenda.

My name is Ngawang Dolkar and I am a member of the Tibetan American community in Minnesota as well as the current president of the Tibetan American Foundation of Minnesota, or TAFM for short. I am here today to make a case for the bill that will financially support our community center to celebrate and teach the art, culture, and heritage of Tibetan Americans in Minnesota..

As many of you may already know, Minnesota has the second highest population of Tibetans in the United States, with an estimated 5,000 Tibetans living in the state. Since 1992, our community has grown due to family reunification and relocation from other states. However, our Tibetan culture and identity is on its way to extinction.

Inside Tibet, the Chinese government has implemented a coercive practice of the colonial boarding school system. Nearly 1 million Tibetan children, as young as 4 years old, are forced to be separated from their parents and barred from any access to their culture and language. They have forcibly closed local Tibetan schools and stopped the teaching of Tibetan language and culture. As a result, it is imperative that we preserve our Tibetan culture and identity in the free world.

To prevent the extinction of our culture, our community center provides weekend language and performing arts classes. Our language classes run from Kindergarten to 8th grade with children from ages 5 to 17, and we have 14 language teachers and 1 principal. We also have 1 performing arts teacher. The children perform during our holiday gatherings, like the Tibetan New Year and the Dalai Lama's birthday. Additionally, our dance students have performed at the Timberwolves games during the opening and during a Half-time show.

In addition to these programs, our community center provides support to our community with several other programs. Lamton is an after-school homework help/mentorship program for middle schoolers and high schoolers by college students. Tibetan Kids Club is a program focused on toddlers ages 3-5 to get together and learn Tibetan culture and doing activities together, like learning nurseries in Tibetan. Our Social Service program offers resources for our community, such as hosting annual flu shot events, providing COVID-19 vaccines/boosters, and feeding the homeless.

I came to the U.S. when I was 9 years old. I was able to participate in the Tibetan language class until 4th grade. Then, I was able to participate in the cultural performing arts class for about 6 years. Participating in these programs really helped shape who I am now. I try to make sure that my 3 kids know about Tibetan culture and the importance of preserving it.

Our community center's cultural programs are currently supported fully by our members, and we have struggled to retain our teachers, especially our arts teacher. We need funding to pay

them appropriately and to purchase better equipment for the classes and instruments for our students.

This summer, we are hosting the 25th anniversary of the Midwest Meet, where the Tibetan communities in Wisconsin and Illinois will join us here for a 4-day gathering to honor and celebrate the Dalai Lama's birthday. We are hosting sports competitions, which include a soccer tournament, men's and women's basketball tournament, cricket tournament and even golf. We are hosting a cultural dance competition amongst the three states and we will have a mega concert with famous Tibetan artists.

Such funding from this bill will help improve everything I mentioned, including the preservation of our culture and identity, the retention of our teachers, the purchase of better equipment and instruments, and the successful execution of the Midwest Meet. I urge this committee to approve of this bill that will appropriate funds for our community center's cultural programs and to help preserve our Tibetan culture and identity. Thank you.