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To the Presidential Award Selection Committee:

I am writing this letter to support the nomination of Ms. Zoe Flanagan for the 2018 Presidential Award for Community Engagement.

Zoe Flanagan is a second-year graduate student in the Masters of Public Policy (MPP) program within the Hatfield School of Government. She is expected to graduate this June. I have known her since Fall 2016, as my advisee. She is also currently working with me as a graduate research assistant in community-based research, conducting a workplace cultural assessment and developing an equity plan for Portland Fire & Rescue.

Ms. Flanagan's passion is to improve the lives of immigrants and refugees. She designed her course of study in the MPP program to acquire knowledge and skills to become an effective policy practitioner, and contribute to policies that affect immigrants and refugees. Ms. Flanagan also actively participated and took a leadership role in off-campus community activities that aim to improve the lives of immigrants and refugees.

From January 2016 to March 2017, Ms. Flanagan volunteered as a legal research intern at the local nonprofit organization VOZ, a worker-led organization that engages in activities that empower and protect civil rights of day laborers and immigrants. VOZ provides leadership development and other educational opportunities, and organizes the community for advocacy. As a legal research intern, Ms. Flanagan conducted various research projects for VOZ, including an analysis on whether to support or oppose the proposed change to the Multnomah County Charter to make the Sheriff an appointed instead of elected position. Ms. Flanagan worked closely with Portland Immigrant Rights Coalition (PIRC), of which VOZ is a member organization. Her report recommendations and subsequent discussions led Ms. Flanagan to a leadership role as liaison between the Multnomah County Sheriff's office and PIRC.

Shortly after the 2016 presidential election, VOZ and PIRC together organized two community assembly meetings to provide forums for community members to learn about and formulate action plans in response to Trump Administration immigration policies. Ms. Flanagan played an integral role in organizing the two events, which attracted about 300 people each. She gave administrative support, set up PIRC member organization meetings every two weeks, and coordinated other preparatory events in the community.

Engaging in policy research that has real-world consequences, and organizing large community events while being a full-time graduate school is not easy, yet Ms. Flanagan maintained a high GPA of 3.88, and served as student representative for the MPP program, and conducted student surveys to provide feedback to the department, and also organized social and network events for the students. I am extremely impressed with her strong conviction on the value of engagement and her desire to contribute to the community through her academic training.

In an essay Ms. Flanagan shared with me, she stated:

My goal is to learn how to engage immigrant communities and underrepresented communities in general to inform policy development. I believe policies should be informed by those directly impacted, instead of by those who are far removed and unaware of the true implications of their decisions.

Ms. Flanagan sees community engagement as an important and often missing component in policy development, and aims to become a practitioner who empowers others to make a difference in their communities.

I believe Zoe Flanagan's accomplishments in off-campus community engagement builds upon her academic achievements and intellectual curiosity, and passion for public service, and makes her a strong candidate for the Presidential Award in Community Engagement. Portland State University is lucky to have Ms. Flanagan as a student, and we should be proud of her.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at nishism@pdx.edu or 5-5151.

Sincerely,



Masami Nishishiba, Ph.D.

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