



King County

**Councilmember Rod Dembowski
Council District 1
Metropolitan King County Council**

January 9, 2026

VIA EMAIL: klentzsch@me.com

Ms. Kathi Lentzsch
Refugee Artisan Initiative
PO Box 25813
Seattle, WA 98165

Re: Concerns re Board Leadership and Organizational Stability at RAI

Dear Ms. Lentzsch:

Together, the undersigned elected leaders represent northeast Seattle on the King County Council, in the Washington State Senate, and the Washington State House of Representatives. We write today to express our grave concerns about developments that we are just coming to learn about at the Refugee Artisan Initiative (RAI). RAI is a vital and important organization in our district, and in particular, the Lake City community.

Together, we have personally worked to secure millions of dollars in grants for capital and operating support for RAI in the last five years. King County, pursuant to budget direction from Councilmember Dembowski, has invested over \$4 million since 2021. The State of Washington, pursuant to budget direction from Senator Valdez and Representative Farivar, has invested \$778,000. We have each, over the years, visited RAI's operations many times, attended its events, and spoken at its programs, with its employees and its program participants. County Councilmember Rod Dembowski was personally involved in negotiating the acquisition of the new headquarters for RAI with the building's former owner.

Our collective support for RAI is founded upon the vision, work, and relationship cultivated by founder and Executive Director Ming-Ming Tung-Edelman. We have, for years, consistently worked very well and closely with Director Edelman, have witnessed her unending, devoted work to grow the organization and advance the interests of our immigrant and refugee communities. We strongly believe that organizations such as RAI benefit from and keep credibility with community and community partners like King County and the State of Washington, when they are immigrant-led because of the authenticity of the experience and the connections to community that such leadership brings. We each work closely with communities of color in our districts and with immigrant and refugee communities. We are concerned that the Board of RAI, as presently constituted, does not have apparent deep and broad connections with the community that RAI serves. We also understand that growing a new non-profit can be stressful and challenging and that leaders can benefit from skill development and additional resources. We have confidence that Ming-Ming has the skills, vision, and values to lead RAI.



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We are therefore extremely troubled to learn of your and purportedly the Board of Directors' efforts to remove Ming-Ming from her role as the leader of the organization, and to do so without any communication with core funding partners such as our governments. We have a duty as elected leaders in our community to look out for broad community interests, core values, and to ensure that RAI, in particular, continues its successful mission. Candidly, we are concerned about this apparent attempt to take over RAI by individuals who do not have strong connections to our immigrant and refugee communities and that such a series of actions would be taken with no outreach to key supporters such as us. We believe that your actions could spell the end of RAI. King County is the beneficiary of a deed restriction on the headquarters property and has a direct interest in the future of RAI as we know it and funded it.

We request that the Board immediately stop its apparent efforts to remove Ming-Ming from her role as leader of RAI. Such a drastic move would result in our collective loss of confidence in RAI as a well-functioning organization and jeopardize further support from King County and the State of Washington could be in jeopardy. We suggest a time-out and further dialogue with community partners and broader reflection by the Board on its approach to leading RAI through its growth and the natural challenges that come with such growth.

We hope that you and the Board will take these concerns seriously and work to restore stability at RAI under the leadership of Ming-Ming Tung-Edelman.

Sincerely,

Rod Dembowski
Budget Chair
King County Council

Javier Valdez
State Senator

Darya Farivar
State Representative

Copy to:

All RAI Board Members

Ming-Ming Tung-Edelman, RAI Founder and Executive Director