

Chair Keny-Guyer and members of the Committee,

My name is Salah Ansary, Senior District Director of Lutheran Community Services Northwest.

Nearly 41 years ago I was uprooted from my homeland, Afghanistan. I arrived in Portland in 1978. In 1981, I welcomed my own family (mother and siblings) who arrived as refugees. Since 1980 I have devoted my life in the cause of refugees as I see it my personal calling. For the past 34 years, I have been honored to have the opportunity to work and assist refugees from all corners of the world. Amazingly my story is no different from thousands and thousands of other refugees that we welcome today. I will never forget the day that I welcomed my own family at the airport receiving my own mother and siblings. My youngest brother run into my arms crying and the first question he asked me was what is going to happen to us. He was so scared in that moment.

Today, all these years later, I am here to testify in support of House Bill 2508 so that our newest families know they are wanted and welcomed by all Oregonians, and are not scared.

As you've just seen, Oregon's Refugee Resettlement Agencies have welcomed more than 67,000 refugees to the Northwest since 1975. Our services begin with the welcoming of refugees at the airport and include a myriad of services from finding housing, offering cultural orientation, removing employment barriers, providing volunteer/mentoring services, mental health services, adjustment support groups, and coordination with other service providers---all to pave the way for the meaningful integration of refugees in our state.

Refugees who have finally made it to Oregon have been through an arduous and perilous journey. Despite these hardships, they remain hopeful and resilient in making a fresh start and a better future for themselves, their families, and their communities. At LCSNW, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, and Catholic Charities of Oregon and numerous refugee service providers, we are fortunate to witness these amazing human stories and successes every day.

Unfortunately in the past two years the US Refugee Program, once a leader in the world, has plummeted in the number of refugees resettled and funding for the program has suffered serious cuts. On average, the United States has admitted 80,000 - 100,000 refugees annually. In 2018 the number of individuals we welcomed was down to roughly 20,000 – a historic low. As a result, the services needed to help our families as they rebuild their lives are now at risk. Oregon's history of welcoming refugees is now at risk.

We are therefore extremely grateful to Representative Carla Piluso for sponsoring House Bill HB 2508 and for you, the House Committee on Human Services and Housing, for considering this important issue. This Bill will enable Oregon to continue to support refugees, who are among the world's most vulnerable and have suffered significant losses in their journey of hope, uprooted from their homes and loved ones because of the atrocities and injustices inflicted upon them. The passage of this Bill is dependent on your humanitarian support. Don't let 2019 be the year that Oregon shuts the door on refugees. This Bill will provide a lifeline to refugees who have much to offer our communities, state and country. We hope you stand with refugees in support of this Bill. Thank you.