



March 5, 2019

House Committee on Human Services & Housing
RE: HB 2508, Welcoming Refugees Bill

Chair Keny-Guyer, Vice-Chair Noble and Members of the Committee,

My name is Jan Musgrove Elfers, and I am the President of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). EMO has helped to author and is fully supportive of HB 2508, the Welcoming Refugees bill.

The state of Oregon has welcomed nearly 70,000 refugees to our state since 1975. A refugee is someone who has fled one's home country and cannot return because of a well-founded fear of persecution based on religion, race, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. EMO's Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees (SOAR), along with Lutheran Community Services Northwest and Catholic Charities of Oregon, have nearly 200 years of combined experience resettling refugees in Oregon.

HB 2508 will provide refugees with Extended Case Management (ECM) over two years, including employment services and supports to school-aged children. Refugees who receive ECM for two years are significantly less likely to depend on public assistance long-term.

Investing in refugees from their first few years of arrival accelerates their trajectory for success. Studies have shown that with proper support and case management, refugees are generally employed within six months and bring immense contributions to the economy, diversity, and social fabric of the state. When refugees are better equipped with support services and ECM, crisis situations are less common, saving taxpayer money going toward emergency responses, emergency room visits and public assistance.

Both newly arrived refugees and those who have been in the state for up to five years will have support to succeed if the state of Oregon funds this request. In the face of federal budget cuts to such services over the past two year, the funding included in HB 2508 will ensure that refugee families will continue to receive the critical support they need to thrive in our communities.

Oregon plays a critical role in the global response to the refugee crisis. As the number of refugee families admitted to the United States has dwindled, our state must continue to defend America's longstanding tradition of protecting the persecuted and ensuring that our nation remains a beacon of hope for decades to come. I urge your support for HB 2508.

Respectfully,
Jan Musgrove Elfers

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