

To whom it may concern:

I support HB 2508.

Over the last three years I've been a volunteer assisting recently arrived refugees in Salem.

When they get here, most of these people have little or no English (they sometimes even have literacy challenges with their native languages), limited job skills, and they're completely unfamiliar with our culture, government, and systems. On top of all that many of them have experienced mental or physical trauma. They need so much help with so many things!

The local community has stepped up admirably to help them, providing everything from food, housewares and furniture, transportation, to English tutoring, as well as assistance with everything from doctor appointments to learning to use public transit.

But the needs are overwhelming, and those of us involved are painfully aware that federal funding has been shrinking even as the needs have been growing.

Many volunteers (including myself) have also contributed their own money for everything from a few dollars to help pay the phone bill, to substantial donations from local faith groups to supplement rent after the far too short initial six months of federal assistance runs out.

It's easy to say that it's unrealistic for Oregon to provide funding for refugees when we already have enough need here as it is - yes there are many more people who've never left the state and who also have the same challenges that refugees do, such as finding affordable housing, getting a job, and accessing health care - why not help them first?

Well, they are already being helped, though more is always better. But Oregon isn't an island and neither is the USA. There are more refugees in the world right now than at any time in world history, and they deserve our help as much as anyone does. Yes there is need here on our doorstep, but there is even more beyond our borders, and we should not turn away. Until the federal government regains some compassion and understands that we can't stand alone, states like Oregon can set an example and step in to fill the gap.

Sincerely,

Alexander Benenson  
Salem, Oregon