

HB 2508

Relating to refugees in Oregon

HB 2508 appropriates \$2 million General Fund to the Department of Human Services to award grants to refugee resettlement agencies. The bill specifies that \$200,000 of the appropriation must be distributed to a culturally responsive employment service provider to be selected by the department.

The Federal Office of Refugees Resettlement defines a refugee as any person admitted to the United States under federal laws who cannot return to their own country out of fear they will be persecuted due to race, religion, political opinion, or national origin.

Resettlement agencies [such as Catholic Charities, Lutheran Community Services Northwest, and Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees] help refugees in Oregon resettle by providing services, for up to two years, to refugees who are within five years of arrival. Assistance includes help to obtain a Social Security card and DMV identification, education on opening a bank account and how to pay rent and utility bills, English language instruction, assistance to enroll children in school and making health screening appointment, as well as identifying refugees' employment skills and providing referrals to employment skills training and other job support services.

Historically, the Department of Human Services funds refugee services with federal funds. However, Oregon has just received notice of suspension of federal obligations for social services for the third quarter. Passage of this bill mitigates the impact of this suspension in federal funding, on both refugees and resettlement agencies. This funding would serve approximately 900 refugees.

The Capital Construction Subcommittee recommends HB 2508 be amended by the -A4 amendment and be reported out do pass, as amended.