



Oregon Refugee Resettlement Collaborative Testimony in Support of Investments to Help Resettle Afghan Evacuees December 11, 2021

Co-Chairs Fahey and Beyer, Co-Vice Chairs Knopp and Wallan, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Salah Ansary, and I serve as the 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.

I am here to testify on behalf of Oregon's six refugee resettlement organizations in support of the proposed \$18m package to help resettle Afghan evacuees.

Since September 30, Oregon has welcomed Afghan citizens who were evacuated in the wake of the Taliban's take over. Oregon's refugee resettlement agencies are committed to do our part to respond to this national challenge by welcoming 1200 Afghans to our state. To do so, crucial immediate and medium-term supports must be in place to ensure Afghans have safe access to robust and trauma-informed services as they start new lives in freedom and safety.

Some of these crucial services include:

First, housing supports as our new neighbors obtain employment and become financially resilient.

Second, immigration legal services. Arriving Afghans are largely entering with temporary permission called parole. Parole is not an immigration status with a pathway towards citizenship. Individuals will need to apply for affirmative asylum or other immigration remedy and navigate the long and complex process in the hope of being able to avoid removal from the country. Asylum cases are complex and time consuming and must be navigated with the support of a knowledgeable and qualified immigration attorney or DOJ accredited representative.

And third, case management support. Refugees benefit from the cultural, linguistic and systems knowledge of case managers to access comprehensive wraparound services both upon arrival and during other periodic challenging moments in their first years in Oregon, including:

- Support to secure housing and food;
- Employment, counseling, and training and job placement;
- Interpretation services;
- Assistance connecting to public benefits and health services;
- Assistance enrolling in school, and
- Other supports.

Oregon has proudly welcomed these new Oregonians, regardless of where in our state they live. They 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. This investment is a lifeline to our Afghan allies and partners. We ask for your support.

Thank you.

Salah Ansary
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