

To : Senate Committee on Human Services Chair and Members

From: Jim Stembridge
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Testimony in support of **SB 718**

I am Jim Stembridge of here in Salem Oregon. With my wife, Joan Stembridge, we have worked to welcome refugees coming to Salem for the past five years. With financial partners we have purchased and renovated three (soon to be four) Salem homes for rent at below-market rates to large refugee families. Current occupants are 26 persons originally from Syria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These are wonderful, hard-working families; having escaped the horrors of war and persecution, now welcome in their new neighborhoods; adults with jobs in places like Kettle Foods, Oregon Freeze Dried, Capitol Manor, and Goodwill Industries; children in school from pre-K to community college, valued members of their Salem and Oregon communities. Like the immigrant ancestors of us all, they deserve our welcome, our devotion, and our support while in transition to their new lives, their new beginnings.

We are members of, and financial contributors to, Salem for Refugees, the local refugee-welcoming organization whose volunteers provide, in addition to locating housing, help with finding employment, transportation, health care, legal assistance, school enrollment, English-learning, and community assimilation.

Critical to the welcoming and successful assimilation are the refugee resettlement agencies that provide professionally-administrated assistance with initial arrivals and continuing to assure successful relocation through case management. Refugee resettlement agencies have been depleted in recent years due to temporary federal anti-immigration policies. Augmented financial support for these agencies, now, will benefit the building of a stronger foundation for the future assimilation success of refugee families. Refugee families that have finally arrived in Oregon and the United States of America need more initial support. SB 718 will help .

As Oregon legislators, your devotion to duty is a model for peaceful representative government, something previously missing in the lives of many of our refugee (now formerly-refugee) families. Thank you for your service.

And thank you for your consideration of SB 718.