



March 30, 2021

Chair Sara Gelser
Vice-Chair Dick Anderson
Members of the Senate Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery Committee

RE: SB 718 – Welcoming Refugees

Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Anderson, and members of the Senate Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB 718, the Welcoming Refugees bill. My name is Elona J Wilson, and I am the Advocacy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color, an alliance of culturally specific community-based organizations with representation from African, African American, Latinx, Middle Eastern and North African, Native American, Pacific Islander, and Slavic communities in Oregon.

The Coalition of Communities of Color’s mission is to address the socioeconomic disparities, institutional racism, and inequity of services experienced by our families, children and communities; and to organize our communities for collective action resulting in social change to obtain self-determination, wellness, justice and prosperity.

In the vein of prosperity, we must ask ourselves how we can better support Oregon’s collective prosperity; one of the answers is SB 718. This bill would invest \$4.3 million to expand access to these new Oregonians in greater Portland, Salem, Lane County, and Ontario. The Oregonians served by this program have overcome significant challenges, including refugees, interpreters who have served alongside U.S. armed forces abroad, asylees, and human trafficking survivors. Now that they are part of our community, we should honor their resilience and support their success.

In 2019, the coalition supported the original Welcoming Refugees bill, which provided access to nearly half of the newly arrived refugees. Given the success of these investments, it is time to increase access. Refugees experience significant disparities in our state, and these vulnerabilities have only been increased during COVID and the economic crisis. By expanding extended case management to all 2,100 folks, will help refugees adjust to their new communities and access critical services and programs. By investing in refugees early on in their first years of





arrival—especially during this critical time—we will support the financial stability, health, educational success, employment, and overall well being of our newest neighbors. Refugees contribute immensely to our state, and we must continue our legacy of welcoming those who are fleeing crises and persecution. When we provide refugees with the resources they need, we can create a better, more equitable Oregon

At the coalition, we celebrate diversity and work to address the disparities faced by our communities of color and expanding investments to our refugee populations. This legislation will bring us one step closer to our commitment as a state for equity and inclusion. In the vein of equity and on behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color, I urge you to take action to support Oregon’s collective prosperity by voting yes on SB 718.

On behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color,

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elona J. Wilson".

Elona J Wilson
Advocacy Director
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