



March 31, 2021
Senator Kayse Jama
Senate District 24

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

During my time with Unite Oregon, we were a member of Refugee Resettlement Collaborative that advanced the Welcoming Refugees Bill in 2019. That bill is first-in-the-nation legislation that enables refugees and others to get help accessing employment, health, housing, education, and other supports for a total of two years during the first five years after they arrive in the U.S. My personal experience reflects the experiences of so many community members served by Unite Oregon: When we meet our moral obligation to not just allow refugees to resettle in Oregon but ensure they thrive as full members of our communities, we are a stronger state.

SB 718 would not just renew funding for these services that are primarily provided in the Metro area but would expand funding so that Oregon refugees in more parts of the state have access to these important services. Every Oregon refugee is worthy of this support. I can't emphasize enough how the ability for refugees to gain this help from organizations they trust – from case managers who are often themselves refugees from the same community and who speak the refugee's language – can help families start new lives and navigate complex government systems to access crucial assistance.

My entire career, I have worked to built community power, and that this power is built person by person through empowering one individual to speak up. The 2019 bill and SB 718 ensure that when Oregon refugee families speak up for access to key supports, that these are made available through culturally and linguistically responsive programming, and that every individual refugee and their family are stable in the finances, housing and healthcare to help others build power together.

It is because of this, that I strongly urge you to vote yes to support SB 718.

Thank you.