



February 15, 2023

To: House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services

RE: HB 3176

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and members of the committee:

I am the Board Chair for the Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice (IMIrJ). Our work focuses on practicing liberating community organizing and advocacy centered on relationships, accompanying immigrant communities as we face the immigration system. We develop faith communities' capacity to build relationships for advocacy and action for immigrant justice and promote interfaith collaboration and dialogue. IMIrJ leads in outreach across Oregon for the creation of transformational, educational, and relational opportunities for immigrants and people of faith to take public action and stand in solidarity. We currently have relationships with over fifty faith communities across the state and are building cohorts of immigrant community organizers

Beginning in 2008, IMIrJ has hosted an Accompaniment Program. We support immigrants in court appearances, appointments with ICE, or any other requests where immigrants are vulnerable and ask for support. Because of these encounters, we have an accurate and relevant perspective on the experiences of those people seeking asylum. In contrast to refugees that are supported by refugee resettlement agencies, asylum-seekers come to our community as strangers and we do our best to "Welcome the Stranger." Many arrive in our communities after harrowing journeys with no housing, no connections, and in need of the most basic support and services starting with housing, food, and jobs. There are no services offered by the Federal or State systems. Some faith communities have supported asylum-seekers using their resources. But the need is much greater than the capacity.

Since 2020, IMIrJ has been working with OHA, ODHS, and, more recently the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement to define systems that will support those seeking asylum. We have envisioned an infrastructure that starts with the needs of the people. They have told us what they need. Their first defined need is housing. A survey of the 8-10 individuals we were working with this fall prioritized affordable, stable housing where they can live near one another in the community as their preferred option. They were open to short-term housing but again near each other (i.e., pods, temporary shelter model), and their least preferred option was being separated and in individual congregational homes (i.e., the model IMIRJ has done in the past).



We are very encouraged about introducing HB 3176 and establishing a Welcome and Reception Program. There is a need and this legislation takes a step to establish an infrastructure that will support people in our community seeking asylum. However, we have some concerns and suggestions with the bill as introduced.

- The language in this bill addresses “immigrants and refugees.” Although the intent is that the term “immigrants” includes those seeking asylum, we believe that the needs of asylum-seekers are unique and different from others. **We propose adding language to this bill that identifies explicitly asylum seekers as beneficiaries.** The bill uses the term “immigrant and refugees.” Adding “immigrants/asylum seekers and refugees” or “newly arrived immigrants seeking protection in the U.S and refugees” would make it clear that the support offered applies to those seeking asylum.
- In our work with asylum seekers, housing is the first and most important need. For those seeking asylum and who have no other support, **adding housing assistance as an explicit priority to both short-term and long-term provisions in the bill is an important addition.**
- We want to ensure that those affected by the services provided have a direct voice in what those services are and how they are administered. **We would like to see a more formal accountability structure for grantees to include accountability to the impacted community.** We suggest that performance outcomes from grantees must include feedback from community members using the services. These outcomes should be used in the prioritization of how funds are allocated.

We hope that our organization has input into the details of this legislation. We will work with other community organizations and service providers to make this legislation clearer and more responsive to the community's needs.

Sincerely,

Bob Brown
Board Chair, Interfaith Movement for Immigrant Justice