



## World Education Services Statement of Support for SB 272

World Education Services (WES) supports Oregon's SB 272, which would allow refugees, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, and individuals who entered the country under the Compact of Free Association (COFA) between the United States and the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, or the Federated States of Micronesia for exemption from nonresident tuition and fees for undergraduate and graduate degree programs at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU).

WES is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to helping international students, immigrants, and refugees achieve their educational and career goals in the U.S. and Canada. For more than 45 years, WES has set the standard of excellence in the field of international academic credential evaluation. Through WES Global Talent Bridge, the organization joins with institutional partners, community-based organizations, and policymakers to help immigrants and refugees who hold international credentials fully utilize their talents and education to achieve their academic and professional goals. Through its grantmaking, impact investing, and partnerships, the WES Mariam Assefa Fund seeks to advance economic and social inclusion for immigrants and refugees.

Given the success of similar efforts in the state, SB 272 is an example of evidence-based policy making. Extending in-state tuition rates to eligible refugees, Special Immigrant Visa holders, and other eligible students who attend Oregon Health and Science University is an investment in Oregon's future workforce and the state's economic and social vitality.

Immigrants and refugees make up approximately 13.5% of Oregon's population: 31,681 refugees live in the state, with nearly half of the state's refugees living in Portland in 2018.<sup>1</sup> Oregon's refugee population—94% of which is employed—makes a significant contribution to the state's economy. Data from the American Immigration Council estimates that the total refugee household income in Oregon in 2019 was \$1.5B, with an estimated \$1.1B in spending power. Refugees in Oregon contributed \$407.3M in state, local, and federal taxes.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> New Americans in Portland, OR. New American Economy. Available at: <https://www.portland.gov/civic/immigrants/documents/new-american-economy-2020-research-english/download>

<sup>2</sup> Map the Impact: New Americans in Oregon. American Immigration Council. Available at: <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/oregon/>



The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that only 6 percent of refugees globally are enrolled in higher education institutions,<sup>3</sup> compared to an average of 40 percent participation in tertiary education.<sup>4</sup> According to the UNHCR, cost—along with language barriers and secondary credential recognition—is one of the top barriers to access to higher education for refugees worldwide.<sup>5</sup> One improvement WES recommends for SB 272 is to include Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders as a category of displaced students eligible for in-state tuition at OHSU.

SB 272 would help further address the financial challenges that refugees and SIV holders face in accessing higher education and has the potential to accelerate their social and economic inclusion.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement of support.

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<sup>3</sup> Refugee Statistics. UNHCR. Available at: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>

<sup>4</sup> School Enrollment, Tertiary (2021). The World Bank Data. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SE.TER.ENRR>

<sup>5</sup> Stepping Up: Refugee Education in Crisis (2018). Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/steppingup/tertiary-education-out-of-reach>