

Questions from House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services:

Question from Rep. Scharf: Definition changing, adding or changing the definition of statue of eligible newcomer. Was there a purpose in changing the definition and not just sticking with what was in the original bill of 2021 from SB 778 that created the office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement? Why are we adding a new definition?

Answer:

SB 778 was enacted by the legislature for the purpose of creating the office and a broad framework for advancing the “immigrant and refugee” community at large. The term “newcomers” is not mentioned or defined in SB 778 in keeping with its purpose. Newcomers is an evolved terminology. Since SB778’s passage, we have gained a lot of experience in how policies impact the immigrant and refugee community. It’s important to acknowledge that the immigrant and refugee experience is not a monolith.

To ensure that services are being provided for those who need it, HB4159 uses the term “newcomer” to solve for a particular policy gap in Oregon’s approach to recent arrivals, particularly those seeking asylum. The intent is to create visibility of this subset of the community and efficiently focus on **recent refugee-in-fact** arrivals who are **lawfully** seeking asylum and yet have fallen through the gaps in policy and thus are otherwise unsupported. The focused definition of “newcomer” originates from a long series of community conversations and subject matter expertise; it is intended to bridge the policy gap to those who are unsupported and thus are not already receiving services or support from a federal or state source.

Question from Rep. Hieb: Is this actually going to do anything for the Afghan Refugees that were here more than 2 years ago and so they would not be covered under this law?

Answer:

HB4159 will specifically aid recent Afghan arrivals who are seeking asylum and were left behind when the U.S. withdrew. Many military interpreters, US-law enforcement trainees, US coalition partners, women rights advocates, and others opposed to the Taliban and working to support U.S. interests in Afghanistan were left behind and have made an arduous trek to the US, and now Oregon, where they are seeking asylum. This bill would serve them and many others in similar situations because, in the case of left behind Afghans, Operation Allies Welcome excludes them from support and prior state policy funding decisions also excluded them. Thus, without HB4159, these Afghans and similar individuals would face abandonment again in having the critical support needed to transition into Oregon society.