



February 5, 2024

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chairs Scharf and Nguyen and Members of the Committee,

My name is Britt Conroy, and I serve as Public Policy Director at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. At EMO's SOAR Legal Immigration Services program, we serve more than 2000 Oregonians statewide annually with life-changing legal representation and support. EMO's six food, housing and other programs see hundreds of thousands of client visits every year, and we are proud to partner with our 15 member denominations that represent nearly 750 congregations across the state.

EMO enthusiastically supports HB 4085, Pathways to Protection and Citizenship. HB 4085 came before you as HB 2957A in 2023, and earned this Committee's unanimous backing. HB 4085 is a bill that will save and strengthen families, improve outcomes in other ODHS programs, bolster our workforce and strengthen Oregon's general fund.

Up to 1/3 of Oregonians without an immigration status are actually eligible under federal law for an immigration status. That is thousands of Oregonians who, but for a few hundred dollars, are living in fear, out of the employment mainstream, unable to support their families.

This committee has focused a great deal on the social determinants of health. For Oregonians who lack adequate immigration status, the resulting barriers to employment and housing, and the pervasive stress and anxiety that is tied to that status, result in poor health outcomes.

Immigrant and refugee communities make up more than 13% of our state's workforce, yet legal costs prevent many Oregonians from obtaining a more secure immigration status. This bill's one-time support of Oregonians to offset these legal costs will stabilize our workforce.

Additionally, this bill will help ODHS programs further stabilize families, removing a barrier to true self-sufficiency for many Oregonians.

And HB 4085 will strengthen Oregon's General Fund. When Oregonians secure an immigration status, our neighbors no longer need to rely on Oregon-funded programs, such as Healthier Oregon, but can instead benefit from federally supported programs, such as Medicaid.

Thank you for your partnership on this important bill, and for standing with all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Britt Conroy
Director of Public Policy
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO)