

Submitter: Elijah Penner

On Behalf Of:

Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services

Measure: HB4085

My name is Elijah Penner. I work with Salem For Refugees. We are a nonprofit currently resettling approximately 300+ refugees annually here in Oregon.

The vast majority of refugee families arrive to Oregon with the clothes on their back and a few bags of belongings. Most arrive with no connections in the area and are dependent on SFR, as a small nonprofit, to assist them in setting up a new life in this country. For reasons of lack of language, transportation and childcare, SFR faces immense challenges helping new neighbors to find gainful employment during the initial resettlement period, which in turn means many refugee families look to SFR for support with monthly rent, utilities etc. well into their first year in country. Even for families who manage to secure multiple wage earners, each month there are often difficult financial decisions which must be made concerning what most of us would consider "basic expenses" such as hygiene materials, clothing, and kitchen items. Refugee households typically spend much more than 50% of their income on rent and utilities, making them severely cost-burdened.

Refugees are obliged to apply for lawful permanent residence after 12 months in the country, but are not in a position to pay the legal fees required for an immigration attorney (to complete the I-485) or a civil surgeon (to complete the I-693). With this, I wish to submit a testimony in strong support of HB 4085. Thank you for your consideration.

Elijah