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Co-Chair Broadman, Co-Chair Evans, Members of the Committee:

For the record my name is Christine Zeller-Powell and I am here in support of POP 130 and to share how Oregonians benefit from the immigration legal services Catholic Community Services provides.

The funding we receive from the Oregon State Bar to provide immigration legal services allows us to help Oregonians seek safety, avoid deportation, and pursue permanent status. Before this funding existed, community members routinely missed their one-year filing deadlines for asylum because they could not find attorneys to help them. This usually meant they had no way to pursue permanent protection and legal status in the United States. Now, with this statewide funding, this is less of a problem.

We contract with the Oregon State Bar to operate a Clinic program. This means that the majority of the services we provide are limited in scope. For example, we help individuals prepare and submit their asylum applications but our attorneys do not enter an appearance as the attorney of record with the immigration court or USCIS. With this funding, we have been able to accept 278 cases and serve 323 unique individuals in less than two years.

CCS's Refugee and Immigrant Services Program provides immigration legal services, refugee resettlement, case management and employment services for immigrants of various statuses. For example, we currently have a state funded Newcomers Pilot Project that provides 6 months of wrap-around case management to recently arrived immigrants who are not eligible for traditional refugee services. In less than seven months, we have served 54 households. Because of the funding we receive from the Oregon State Bar, we have been able to help these Pilot Project participants obtain work authorization. This is key in helping these new Oregonians achieve self-sufficiency in a timely manner. This Pilot Program would not be as successful without the provision of immigration legal services.

There is still work to be done. We are in the process of expanding our own capacity, raising up existing non-attorney staff to become U.S. Department of Justice accredited representatives so they are able to offer advice and representation. Once those staff are accredited we hope to expand our contract with the Oregon State Bar further. The funding made possible through this POP will enable that to occur. We have no doubt that the need for immigration legal services will continue and we look forward to partnering with the Oregon State Bar to meet those needs.