

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, members of the Committee, my name is Howard Kenyon. I am from Salem and am writing in support of SB 149 as amended.

I am keenly supportive of refugee resettlement efforts in Oregon and serve on the board of directors for Salem for Refugees. For a number of years prior to my retirement in 2023, I was the vice president of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon and in that role oversaw EMO's longstanding SOAR Refugee Resettlement Program.

I was there in 2019 when HB 2508 was passed, one very proud moment for our state when we acknowledged the integral role refugees as well as immigrants play in making Oregon the great state it is today. These upfront investments pay off multiple dividends for our state, including improving economic vitality and increased entrepreneurship.

Equally important to me is how these investments strengthen our cultural and moral fiber as a state, investments of a priceless nature. We become far richer as we embrace those who find refuge within our borders.

It is my faith that drives my lifelong commitment to refugee resettlement. So, I must admit that my spirit is deeply troubled in these times when such work faces headwinds rarely equaled in our nation's history. In fact, those other "equal" times are some of the darkest chapters in our people's more commonly brilliant trajectory.

Regardless of how one views these headwinds, Oregon has already welcomed a large increase in refugee arrivals over the past 2 years. These new arrivals will integrate well and bless our state as we give them appropriate welcoming assistance.

At the same time, I am concerned that refugee community needs may increase with federal decisions impacting other services and supports, as well as the fallout they will face should we move into economic recession. The expectation we hear expressed as cuts are made at the federal level is that states are better equipped to handle local need. This is the time to demonstrate how well our state can step up to strengthen resettlement agencies in times of federal funding cuts.

Having already welcomed these refugees settling among us, we must live up to our high calling as Oregonians. Consider it a timely investment in our state's bright future.

Sincerely,

Howard N. Kenyon  
Salem, Oregon  
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