

April 9, 2025

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee:

As congregational members of Grace Lutheran Church in Corvallis Oregon, and people who have worked in refugee settlement for 46 years, we are writing to advocate for the passage of SB 149, the “Oregon’s New Neighbors Coordinated Access Act”. We know firsthand the needs that refugees have when they first arrive and believe that this bill will provide critical support services for them. We have seen the immense difference these types of services can make in the lives of people who have been upended from their homes and are trying to establish their families in a new place.

SB 149 will do exactly what it says – create coordinated access to the stabilizing support services for new Oregonians. When a new immigrant community member arrives, they will be able to find the emergency support that they need in a timely way, so they can shelter and house their families, enroll in school and healthcare services, and begin a new life contributing to their community.

SB 149 expands the Extended Care Management program for refugees and other community members who are eligible, which will enable resettlement agencies and other CBO’s to provide additional assistance to families who may need a little extra support when they time out of traditional resettlement services.

We have seen how immigrants contribute to our economy, our schools, our churches, and our communities. Refugees from Laos and Vietnam that we helped resettle in the 1970’s became good citizens of Corvallis, opening and operating 5 restaurants, working and retiring from local companies, and sending their children to college. More recently, a family from the Congo with many challenges including a disabled child, was able to save enough money to buy a house. And a Syrian family was able to enroll their children in school and get needed medical and dental care for the mother and son.

People move – and like any new neighbor, a little bit of support and welcome goes a long way for our refugee and immigrant neighbors. This bill is an opportunity for Oregon to choose to invest in welcoming its newest neighbors. In a time of great uncertainty for this community, your vote for the Oregon New Neighbors Coordinated Access Program will mean that a new generation of Oregonians feels safer and welcomed in our beautiful state.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,

Gordon and Mary Ann Matzke