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Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Anderson, and Members of the Committee,

Working with over 150 congregations, organizations, and interfaith partners, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO) strives to envision communities of faith in ministry together creating a more peaceful, just, sustainable, and compassionate world. We advocate and partner with groups to welcome refugees and immigrants to Oregon.

EMO strongly supports SB 718 in renewing funding for the extended case management, employment and other supportive programming established nearly unanimously by the Legislature in 2019, and expanding it statewide so more newly arrived refugees have access to health care, education, employment and other services they need to start new lives.

Through EMO's Sponsors Organized to Assist Refugees (SOAR) resettlement program we have seen first-hand how these funds have been necessary to provide comprehensive and compassionate services for refugees in Oregon. This is especially true in times of a pandemic. Covid-19 has exacerbated the need for these services as people navigate losing their jobs, paying rent, keeping food on the table, finding medical care and much more.

Refugees arriving to Oregon often are confronted with language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of support. Case management services are tailored to the community member's needs, which over the past 18 months have meant 570 Oregonians have accessed health care, affordable housing, transportation, support groups, student and parent engagement in school and life skills training. Many of these same individuals and others also enrolled in employment support programming, with 315 individuals placed in employment.

In many cases, people having access to unemployment and/or other DHS funding benefits has meant the difference between being able to pay the rent or not. "Mikael" lost his job due to the pandemic and needed an immediate way to provide for his family of five. A case manager was able to help them apply for DHS benefits including food stamps, medical insurance (OHP), and educational supports, as well as unemployment benefits that allowed the family to keep their housing until "Mikael" was able to find a new job.

SB 718 is a smart investment for Oregon. We urge you to support this investment in the safety and well-being of our communities.

Sincerely,

Britt Conroy
Public Policy Director, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon