

February 5, 202

Dear Committee Chair, Vice Charis and respected Committee Members on Early Childhood and Human Services and Members of the Committee:

My name is Salah Ansary, Senior Director of Advocacy and Government Affairs at Lutheran Community Services. We are a social services agency with programs in the State of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. For the past 43 years, I have been involved in refugee and immigrant work ever since I was uprooted from my home country of Afghanistan.

I am here to support House Bill 4085. I am grateful to Representative Lisa Reynold and Representative Ricki Ruiz for their support and understanding of the challenges refugees and immigrants face in accessing affordable legal services. Pathways to lawful permanent status are expensive and quite difficult for individuals who are not familiar with immigration law. The process can be overwhelming, leaving families in a position where they don't know where to start unless they are afforded legal representation.

I am extremely grateful that the state Oregon has begun addressing unmet legal needs of immigrants and refugees started with Universal Representation a few years back. House Bill 4085 directs Oregon's Department of Human Services (ODHS) to provide grants, based on income level, which cover the legal fees that documented and undocumented Oregonians may incur as they navigate the process of applying for permanent protection. These grants can be used to pay for application fees for citizenship, residency, or visas. Grants will flow through ODHS within their existing immigration program and be awarded to agency-approved immigration legal services providers, who then connect directly with families seeking legal pathways to citizenship in Oregon.

Lutheran Community Services also supports HB 4159, which will provide much needed support services to the asylum seekers.

Thank you, again for your support and consideration of HB 4085.