

Submitter: Alex Riedlinger
On Behalf Of: Africa House
Committee: House Committee On Early Childhood and Human Services
Measure: HB4159

To: House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services
From: Alex Riedlinger, IRCO Africa House, Portland, Multnomah County
Re: HB 2957

Chair Reynolds, Vice Chairs Scharf and Nguyen, and Members of the Committee:

There is an urgent need to address the great number of Black migrants and asylum seekers finding themselves living on the streets of Oregon. Currently, there are upwards of 2000 Black recent arrivals who are struggling to access basic resources like shelter and legal services. Right now, Black asylum seekers, many families with children, are attempting to gain access to shelter systems that are overcapacity with long waitlists, sending advocates and community-based organizations scrambling to arrange for hotels, couches, and permanent housing.

Without question, housing is our most pressing issue, and HB 4159 attempts to lay the groundwork for future infrastructure that can address this need for all asylum seekers and migrants. The state must expand its shelter capacity, long-term supportive housing, and wrap-around services to account for Oregon's increasing population of new arrivals.

As we wait for a federal response to the border, asylum seekers must wait months, sometimes years for their asylum applications to be processed, credible fear interviews to happen, to appear before a judge, and then apply for a work permit. During this time, they cannot work and be self-sufficient and are excluded from federal benefits and social welfare programs. As local entities advocating for asylum seekers, we need the state of Oregon to ensure these community members are not abandoned in lieu of federal funding or policy solutions.

Currently, while enough to pilot a program, the funds proposed are insufficient to meet the housing needs of Oregon's new arrivals. Yet, we support this policy and hope that its passing will act as a commitment by legislators to invest in asylum seekers and new arrivals, and not treat them as a budgetary strain and electoral liability.

Black immigrants are an inherently intersectional community experiencing both anti-Black racism and anti-immigrant xenophobia. We know Black people face housing discrimination, especially amidst a housing shortage, feel a lack of safety in the shelter system, and are often invisible in public discourse about homelessness. The successful integration of Black asylum seekers is a racial justice issue that requires

the empowerment of Black organizations along with culturally specific policies and investments.

This is why we need support from the State, with further funding and new policies to address a long list of urgent, compounding issues facing our underserved new arrival communities, especially Black migrants, and asylum seekers.

Sincerely,
Alex Riedlinger