



February 4, 2025

Chair Hudson, Vice-Chairs Fragala and Harbick and Members of the Committee,

My name is John Herrera, and I serve as Director of Catholic Charities Immigration Legal Services, one of Oregon's oldest and largest immigration legal services non-profits.

Catholic Charities of Oregon enthusiastically supports HB 2586, tuition equity for asylum seekers.

I wish this program had been in place when I fled my home country, Colombia. At the time I fled more than 20 years ago, I was serving as chief of staff to an elected official. When he was killed and my life was threatened, I had no choice but to leave my home and the people I loved.

As a survivor of political violence and as someone forced from their beloved home country due to political corruption and the deliberate extermination of leaders like me, I am grateful for the opportunities this country offers.

I remain truly surprised, however, that we Oregonians still charge asylum seekers out-of-state or international tuition, cruelly keeping higher education out of reach for these brave neighbors of ours.

My story is in many ways a happy one. As an asylee, I worked my way through the ranks at Catholic Charities, learning English and the U.S. immigration system until I eventually became Director of Immigration Legal Services.

That said, as an asylum seeker, then asylee and as a person of color, exclusion and marginalization are norms that are too often a part of life in the United States. I urge you all, Democrats and Republicans, to support HB 2586, and welcome courageous asylum seekers into our higher education communities.

Thank you.

John Herrera
Director of Immigration Legal Services, Catholic Charities of Oregon