

Dear Co-Chairs and Members of the Joint Human Services Ways & Means Committee:

My name is Forrest Miller, and I work for Salem for Refugees, a nonprofit organization dedicated to empowering refugees to thrive in our community. Our mission is to bring people and resources together to help refugees become confident, contributing members of our society. Since our founding in 2016, we have worked closely with a network of volunteers, faith communities, businesses, and other organizations to provide essential services for refugees resettling in Salem. We are honored to have helped over 350 families from countries including Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, and we continue to expand our reach as an affiliate of World Relief. Our vision is to see every refugee in Salem valued and thriving, and we are committed to building long-term relationships and fostering an inclusive, welcoming environment for all.

Oregon's public health system includes federal, state, counties and local agencies, private organizations, community-based organizations, and other partners. Our organization represents one of the 195 community-based organizations that receives Public Health Modernization funding through the Oregon Health Authority.

As integral partners in the public health systems, community-based organizations work to minimize health risks and improve health outcomes. Community-based organizations strengthen the state's capacity to respond to emerging issues that threaten the health of Oregonians. CBOs are trusted within their local communities and are uniquely positioned to reach rural community members, people with disabilities, tribal members and other culturally specific groups who are at greater risk of health disparities.

Salem for Refugees has made significant strides in supporting the health and well-being of the refugee community through its Public Health Modernization work. SFR has partnered with ten local clinics to connect clients to primary care and an initial health screening. New Neighbors often arrive in the United States with unmet health needs

and this initial screening may point to the need for a procedure or reveal an underlying condition not yet diagnosed.

Our dedicated team of case managers and healthcare navigators, including our Ukrainian Navigator and many staff with refugee backgrounds, provide vital support for families navigating the complicated U.S. healthcare system to address these complex medical needs. They assist with everything from medical appointments to accessing mental health resources and nonemergency medical transport services. In recent years, SFR helped several refugees navigate specialist care pathways to access a life saving procedure within months of arrival. For men, women and children who learned they were living with Type 2 Diabetes, our team ensured sustained connection to care needed to manage their condition successfully. The organization has helped hundreds of refugees stay up to date with their immunizations, ensuring they meet requirements for green card applications and school enrollment.

In addition to healthcare support, Salem for Refugees ensures families are connected to essential resources tied to social determinants of health like safe and affordable housing, jobs, English classes, public education (pre-school - 12th grade) and community activities, like sports teams and school events. This comprehensive, holistic approach has been transformative for many refugee families, empowering them to thrive and fully integrate into the Salem community.

OHA's Current Public Health Modernization Budget is \$110M General Fund and represents essential funding for Local Public Health Authorities, Tribal, OHA and community-based organizations like ours who are working in partnership with the State. Since the pandemic, the public health system has been building up the capacity to address public health needs throughout the state, but there is a great deal more work to be done as threats to our health and well-being persist.

We are requesting an additional investment of \$25M into public health modernization budget. The additional \$2M proposed in the Governor's recommended budget does not

provide the level of funding that is truly needed to address the unmet public health needs that exist in our state. For example, many refugee families face barriers in accessing timely and culturally competent mental health services. The trauma experienced by refugees, compounded by the stress of resettlement, often goes unaddressed due to a shortage of providers who understand their unique needs. Increased funding would help expand access to mental and physical health resources, ensuring that these families receive the critical support they need to heal and thrive in our community.

Thank you for your consideration of this important investment in Oregon's public health capacity, and for the opportunity to share the work we are doing in communities across the state.



Member of CHEC - Community Health Equity Coalition

The Community Health Equity Coalition represents dozens of Community-Based Organizations who are an integral part of Oregon's Public Health System.