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Co-Chair Campos, Co-Chair Valderrama, Members of the Committee:

For the record, my name is Christine Zeller-Powell and I am here in support of Senate Bill 5526, sharing how Oregonians benefit from the extended case management, employment, and immigration legal services for refugees and other newcomers that Catholic Community Services of Lane County provides. Much of the funding for this work comes from the Oregon Department of Human Services and allows us to help Oregonians achieve self-sufficiency and pursue permanent immigration statuses.

Renewed Extended Case Management funding will allow CCS to continue to serve refugees, Afghan SIVs, Haitian entrants, certified trafficking victims and others that have arrived over the last several years, keep our programs open so we are here to welcome any new arrivals over the next four years and then be ready when the US Refugee Admissions Program is revitalized in the future. This funding was key to ensuring the survival of the Oregon Resettlement Agencies from 2017-2020 and will be key again.

We also currently have a state funded Newcomers Pilot Project that provides 6 months of wrap-around case management to recently arrived immigrants who are not eligible for traditional refugee services. In seven months, we have served more than 55 households. Because of the State of Oregon universal representation funding we receive, we have also been able to help these Pilot Project participants obtain work authorization. The combination of social services and immigration legal services is essential in helping these new Oregonians achieve self-sufficiency.

It is this essential combination of social services and immigration legal services that leads CCS to call for passage of SB 703, the Pathways to Protection and Citizenship Act, or passage of a budget note to fund this combination of services at ODHS.

ODHS funding for Afghan and Ukrainian populations over the past three years has allowed us to significantly expand our provision of immigration legal services. That funding is ending soon. Additional funding would allow us to take the expertise we have developed in humanitarian immigration law and serve a broader section of Oregonians. Increased funding for immigration legal services would allow us to provide much needed assistance with citizenship applications, family based petitions, and refugee green card applications. These types of applications are not prioritized under the Universal Representation program and assistance is greatly needed.

This work brings me great joy. I love when we can help a client file an asylum application, then when eligible six months later, help them apply for work authorization; and while they wait, have them work with one of our employment specialists to develop a resume and identify potential job opportunities. Then when their work authorization is granted, we help them through the interview and onboarding process. We've developed great partnerships with local businesses and manufacturers who have come to value our clients as hard-working employees. You can see the improvement in well-being as our refugee and immigrant clients go through this process. You can see the pride in the face of a former refugee as they stand with their certificate of naturalization in front of the American flag: a new citizen. The strength and resilience of our clients inspires me to continue this work and advocate for these programs.

We have no doubt that the need for social services for new Oregonians and immigration legal services will continue and we look forward to partnering with the State of Oregon to meet those needs.