

Submitter: Alyssa Walker Keller

On Behalf Of:

Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means Subcommittee On Human Services

Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB5526

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

My name is Alyssa Walker Keller, and I am writing in support of Senate Bill 5526, in particular support of Extended Case Management through the Refugee Services Program at Self Sufficiency.

I have had the privilege of working with migrant, refugee and newcomer community members over the last 20 years, and when I think of the need for Extended Case Management, I picture the faces of dear family friends who were members of a large extended Congolese family arriving in Portland some 10 years ago. The resettlement agency that was supporting them coordinated their hotel and housing stays for the first year they were in Oregon, helped the fathers of the family find work, and coordinated volunteer support to shop for groceries, enroll the children in school, and most importantly, provide a supportive community so that the family did not experience the isolation of moving to an unfamiliar place alone.

About 7 months into their time in Portland, one of the family members had a significant, unavoidable, life threatening medical emergency. Without the ongoing case management, support in accessing medical care, and rent assistance that the resettlement agency was able to provide, my friends and their children would not have been able to surmount the unexpected medical costs on the single income that was supporting them, which occurred beyond the 90 days that they would have been traditionally guaranteed support by resettlement programs.

We all know that people move; this is a reality of life, and some moves are just more life-altering than others. The same need for shelter, work and educational opportunities, healthcare, and accompaniment are the first challenges that my colleagues and I navigate in my current work with newcomer Oregonians as well. And at a time when federal instability has cut funding, not only will Senate bill 5526 provide the urgently needed funding to keep resettlement infrastructure; its passage will compliment work being done in bills such as SB 149, a bill which will both create a more coordinated access program for new Oregonians and strengthen the concepts enshrined in the existing Extended Case Management language.

Our state is stronger, better and more resilient when our newest Oregonians have their basic needs met, and we live into our values of welcome as a state. I ask that you vote yes on SB 5526 and fully fund the Refugee Services Program in this year's

ODHS budget, so that resettlement agencies can continue to provide critical stabilizing services for Oregon's next students, community members and leaders.  
Thank you!

Sincerely,  
Alyssa Walker Keller