

Submitter: Rebecca Zorn
On Behalf Of: Lutheran Community Services Northwest
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB149

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee,

My name is Rebecca Zorn and I am the Director of Refugee and Immigrant Community Integration at Lutheran Community Services Northwest in Portland, Oregon. I am writing to advocate for the passage of SB 194, the "Oregon's New Neighbors Coordinated Access Act".

LCSNW has spent that past 45 years resettling refugees in our community, and we are a proud implementer of the Extended Case Management, or ECM, grant that is funded under this bill. The ultimate goal of our work is to support and empower newcomer families on a pathway to self-sufficiency.

Our team believes that the best way to obtain positive, sustainable outcomes for families, is to ensure root causes of instability are addressed. ECM Case Managers work with families who have arrived in the United States in the past five years. Case Managers conduct needs assessments with families and then carefully create self-sufficiency plans to ensure success. This is particularly important because rather than focusing on one issue such as housing or healthcare, ECM Case Managers can take into account the individual needs of each family member. Our approach ensures clients receive a hand-up, not a handout. All of our outcomes are focused on sustainability. For example, we measure the percentage of clients who report an increased feeling of self-sufficiency after receiving services from LCSNW, as well as the percentage of clients who are able to provide for their family's basic needs.

One of our current clients is a refugee from Afghanistan who was initially resettled in Oklahoma and made his way to Portland. He found himself living on a shared couch, unemployed, and could barely afford food. Upon referral to our organization, our ECM team stepped in. Advocating on his behalf, his case manager secured emergency funds for food. The ECM Program helped him by navigating the system to get refugee cash assistance, register for the Oregon Health Plan, and referred him to Cultural Orientation Sessions to help him understand his new surroundings. He was also linked with our employment services. Now, he lives in a proper apartment, works part-time, and is studying for a certification in medical interpretation. He's come a long way from being homeless in a very short time. This type of sustainable outcome is paramount to the support our team provides through ECM funding, and it demonstrates the resilience and determination of our clients, especially when they have someone cheering them through the process.

Your vote for the Oregon New Neighbors Coordinated Access Program will mean that a new generation of Oregonians feels safer and welcomed in our beautiful state.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration,
Rebecca Zorn, Director, LCSNW