

April 4th, 2025

TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary
FROM: Grace Fortson, Our Children Oregon
SUBJECT: Support for SB 149

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Grace Fortson, I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager with Our Children Oregon (OCO). OCO is a statewide nonprofit committed to whole child wellbeing through the Children's Agenda- a comprehensive legislative agenda created and supported by our more than 135 member organizations across the state. Our Children Oregon urges you to stand in support of SB 149. When we ensure that newcomer families and children have access to support upon arrival and during transition, we ensure healthier, happier Oregonians in the present and future.

SB 149 expands the Extended Case Management program for refugees and other community members who are eligible, which will enable resettlement agencies and other CBO's to provide additional assistance to families who may need a little extra support when they time out of traditional resettlement services.

In 2020, I had the honor of participating in ethnographic research here in Oregon that focused on livelihoods of refugee women in Portland in the context of the pandemic. Through this research, which you can find in the International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy, we learned a great deal about the exclusion of migrants from social services and the devastating impact that could have on individuals and families.

I recall interviewing one woman who worked in precarious employment in order to cover basic necessities for herself and her family. Her job did not include healthcare nor surplus income to cover emergency or even baseline medical expenses. She specifically recognized that her status as a refugee was the primary barrier to receiving any form of government assistance, including healthcare and rent assistance.

Due to this gap in support, Oregonians are placed in positions of uncertainty around their basic needs. This lack of access overwhelms alternative channels of support. SB 149 expands the Extended Case Management program for refugees and other community members who are eligible, which will enable resettlement agencies and other CBO's to provide additional assistance to families who may need a little extra support when they time out of traditional resettlement services.

OCO supports SB 149 as a key support for vulnerable youth in our state. It specifically includes provisions for family preservation services, legal services and social service support for domestic violence and child welfare issues. This is vital to ensure truly holistic support for our most vulnerable community members and ensure family wellbeing for all oregonians. This bill also includes specific assistance for newly arrived refugee children in accessing services to strengthen the children's academic performance and successful integration into the community. As Oregon lags behind the rest of the nation on educational standards, it is imperative to support all children in their educational achievement.

Immigrants and refugees are important members of our communities and we must ensure they are supported. We thank you for your time and efforts to improve the wellbeing of children and families in Oregon. **We urge your support of SB 149.**

Thank you,

Grace Fortson, Policy and Advocacy, Our Children Oregon

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