

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

My name is Catherine Heaton and I am a community member of Salem, a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, and an active member of Salem for Refugees.

I am writing to advocate for the passage of SB 149, the "Oregon's New Neighbors Coordinated Access Act", because I believe in the process of offering welcoming shelter to those who escape from terrible circumstances and seek refuge elsewhere in the world. Salem has been such a place in the past ten years since the birth of Salem for Refugees. Funding has always been limited, amongst other issues in providing refuge. At this particular point in time, however, funding has been discontinued locally and across the US for refugee resettlement. To make matters catastrophic, USAID and other foreign assistance programs have also been cut.

This is incomprehensible to me. How can the richest country in the world turn its back on those in need? The number of displaced people in the world is at an all-time high. Oregon must stand up.

SB 149 will create infrastructure for a coordinated system of reception. It will provide the resources needed for Oregonians who have arrived seeking safety and protection to find housing, health care, employment, and education opportunities. This ensures our new neighbors can achieve their own goals of successfully contributing to our state

This bill is an opportunity for Oregon to choose to invest in welcoming its newest neighbors well. In a time of great uncertainty for this community, 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,
Catherine Heaton