

4/8/25

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

My name is Dr. Lara Knudsen and I am a family physician in Salem. I run a small, 2-doctor primary care practice where we regularly see newly arrived neighbors through our partnership with Salem for Refugees. I am writing in strong support of SB 149, to improve coordinated access to support services for refugees.

I think it's safe to say that even those of us who are from the United States, speak English as our first language, and have a solid education often flounder when we are trying to access our fragmented, complex, and counter-intuitive health care system. Can you imagine trying to navigate that system when you've just arrived in the country in recent weeks or months, don't speak the language, and have no idea how the health care system works? Much of my time with patients in this position is spent just explaining where they need to go for medications, labs, diagnostic imaging, or specialty appointments, and navigating what their insurance will cover and what forms they need to fill out to access care. We rely heavily on ancillary support people, like the case managers at Salem for Refugees, to help these folks get the care they need. Without their help, long-awaited appointments get missed, medications are not taken correctly, testing doesn't get done...which all results in worse health outcomes for the patient and more expense to Oregon's already-strained health care system and budget.

Helping new neighbors get settled into their community more quickly makes sense on a number of levels. It's better for them and their families, it's better for the community as a whole, and it's better for our state economy.

I urge you to vote in support of SB 149.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Lara Knudsen, MD MPH
Happy Doc Family Medicine
Salem, Oregon