

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

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Alyssa Walker Keller. I am a co-founder and organizer with the Asylum Seeker Solidarity Collective, and a member of the Oregon Migrant Rights Alliance- a statewide coalition focused on advocacy and immigrant justice in Oregon, with a diverse membership of 18 organizations.

On behalf of these groups, I am here in strong support of SB 149- 3.

For the last several years my colleagues and I have worked hard to stand in the gap of a broken federal system that too often fails to welcome immigrants with dignity. Without our collective efforts— both in funds and time— hundreds of Oregon families including those with children would have been forced to unsafe, unprotected living conditions. Oregon's mainstream emergency family shelter and rehousing system has been saturated for years. We do this work because we believe no one should have to sleep outside, and because every Oregonian— regardless of how they arrived— deserves safety and an opportunity to thrive.

Our colleagues from the resettlement agencies have traditionally been funded to serve only those classified as “refugee”. As a result, the urgent work of housing and supporting asylum seekers, parolees and others with similar needs has fallen on faith communities, mutual aid networks, and community based organizations. These local organizations have cultural and linguistic expertise and meet needs in a timely and responsive way, and as a result have cultivated community trust.

As national rhetoric grows hostile, and the definition of “refugee” becomes increasingly politicized and exclusionary, this bill reaffirms Oregon's commitment to justice and dignity—that here, we choose to care for people and families who are part of our communities, no matter where they come from.

SB 149-3 makes two necessary updates to Oregon's Extended Case Management program.

First, it acknowledges that many newcomers to Oregon—such as asylum seekers, parolees, and others—arrive under circumstances similar to those of refugees, but are excluded from traditional resettlement services because of narrow federal definitions. These families still need housing, legal navigation, and basic support. This bill ensures they don't fall through the cracks simply because the federal government hasn't kept pace with reality.

Second, it expands which organizations are eligible to provide these critical services. Community-based organizations and culturally specific providers have already stepped up to fill the gaps—often without sustained funding—because they are trusted, embedded, and equipped to meet people's needs. The policy change to recognize and fund these organizations doesn't just make sense—it reflects a proven solution that's already working on the ground.

Together, these changes create a smarter, more inclusive, and more responsive infrastructure—one that meets people where they are, supports them as they stabilize, and helps them contribute fully to Oregon's communities and economy.

We've already seen this model work. Thanks to this Legislature's 2022 investment, over 300 households received critical support. A smaller 2023 budget note helped more than 80 additional families. In Multnomah County, \$1.2 million was invested last year to shelter immigrant families, easing pressure on the mainstream system. When paired with rehousing resources from legislative funding, this approach has helped over 130 families move from unsafe conditions to secure housing in the last 9 months alone.

I know these families. I've witnessed the difference that just a few months of targeted support can make. A safe home, legal guidance, and a path to work or school allows people to put down roots and build a life.

Passage of SB 149-3 will strengthen an already successful program, reflect the lived realities of Oregon communities, and send a clear message that we do not leave our neighbors behind.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to justice and dignity in our state. I urge this committee to pass SB 149-3.

With gratitude,

Alyssa Walker Keller