

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

My name is Janet Chenard and I am a congregation member of First Christian Church Corvallis, and a community member in Corvallis, Oregon. I am writing to advocate for the passage of SB 149, the "Oregon's New Neighbors Coordinated Access Act", I am currently on a Good Neighbor Team for a lovely family of seven Afghani refugees who happily escaped persecution and bombing in their homeland to come to the "land of opportunity". Since arriving, they have faced more hardship due to federal cuts to the infrastructure intended to support them in a sustainable new life.

This bill will do exactly what it says - create coordinated access to the stabilizing support services for new Oregonians. When a new immigrant community member arrives, they will be able to find the emergency support that they need in a timely way, so they can shelter and house their families, enroll in school and healthcare services, and begin a new life contributing to their community.

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.

The Oregon's New Neighbors Coordinated Access Act is the result of refugee resettlement agencies, immigrant-serving CBOs, and government agency collaboration working together to ensure that we continue to welcome new neighbors well. It reflects the shared need for coordinated access to existing systems of support for new Oregonians

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.

Immigrants' contributions to our economy, our schools, our churches, our communities are incalculable. My husband and I, in particular, have had our lives immeasurably enriched the last six months, as we've come to know and interact with our amazing Persian-speaking family of seven from the Badghis province – their language, culture and beliefs though different in many ways from ours also surprisingly align beautifully with how many of my Oregonian friends see life. The family works hard, plays hard and is trying to rise above the horrors they experienced in their homeland since the takeover by the Taliban. One story I would share is the progressive thinking of the 27-year old father who while still in Afghanistan, hired a female teacher (who had been let go from her job due to Taliban rule) for his three eldest daughters, who of course were no longer allowed to attend school.

People move - and like any new neighbor, a little bit of support and welcome goes a long way for our refugee and immigrant neighbors. 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,

Janet Chenard

Retired Municipal Finance Director

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