

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

my name is Kenneth Crouse and I am a volunteer with the Oregon Community Asylum Network (OCAN), the Portland Immigrant Rights Coalition (PIRC), and a member of First Congregational United Church of Christ in Corvallis.

I am writing to advocate for the passage of SB 149, the “Oregon’s New Neighbors Coordinated Access Act”, because in my volunteer work I have seen the need for expanded access to essential services for new arrivals to Oregon. In my work on the PIRC hotline, I have heard the stories of migrants arriving in Portland with no support system who are living on the street or in their cars. Working with OCAN in Lane County I see the discrepancy in the level of services that are available to refugees who are supported by the Refugee Resettlement Coalition and asylum seekers who receive no Federal support for housing, food or health care.

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 CBOs 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 agencies 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. As an example of the need for coordinated services, many arriving asylum seekers to Portland who were in desperate need of shelter had to wait because there was no set-aside emergency shelter capacity at the city or county levels. SB 149 would provide additional capacity so that when a new community member arrives with their children, they do not have to wait for the estimated 6+ months it currently takes to be supported through mainstream shelter and housing services.

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, support which is available to those arriving as refugees, but is not currently available to asylum seekers or parolees who do not have sponsors in Oregon. By making this a *coordinated* system, it will ensure that the needs of one new Oregonian community are not pitted against another or against other communities.

This ensures all of our new neighbors can achieve their own goals of successfully contributing to our state.

The need for expanded case management is critical for new arrivals who are not plugged in to an existing system that has staff dedicated to overseeing the progress of their clients. I have witnessed this first-hand with asylum seekers in Lane County. When asylum seekers arrive, they are required to check in with ICE and appear at an immigration court. One of our asylum seekers got confused about these requirements and failed to show up at a mandatory immigration court hearing. As a result, he was given an order of removal and sent to detention in Tacoma. Had he had a case manager, they could have assured that he showed up at the required appearances.

Oregon's New Neighbors Coordinated Access Program is important and adds value to/supports the values of 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,

Kenneth Crouse