

Greetings Chair Gelser, Vice-Chair Anderson and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services, Mental Health and Recovery.

My name is Matthew Westerbeck. I have the honor and privilege of being the Director of Refugee Services at Catholic Charities of Oregon – an organization that I've been with since 2016. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB718.

I'm here today to express Catholic Charities of Oregon's support and encouragement for the state of Oregon to reinvest in equitable funding for social services and employment services for Oregon's recently arrived refugees and asylees. As some of you may recall through our work together two years ago, in 2019 the Oregon Legislature nearly unanimously passed HB2508. In so doing Oregon set the benchmark across the country by creating an Extended Case Management (ECM) program and making Oregon a national leader in welcoming refugees and asylees. It is important to highlight the historic nature of HB2508 as we prepare to welcome refugee families in the years to come.

Today I am proud to share how your decision to fund this case management model has positively impacted hundreds of refugee families served by four partner agencies. Oregon's investment provided crucial support to Oregon's refugee resettlement infrastructure and service providers. Following an unprecedented reduction in federal funding by the previous administration, Oregon's infrastructure was on the verge of being gutted – taking with it the ability for the state to support our new neighbors.

ECM allows service providers and other advocates to ensure that newcomers to Oregon are provided the wraparound supports needed as they rebuild their lives and strengthen their families in their new home. Crucially, this funding ensures equitable and vital services for a particularly vulnerable population by increasing access for refugee families in our state to enhanced, culturally specific and culturally responsive wraparound supports. HB2508 funding has been particularly essential in supporting refugee families throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Refugee and asylee communities were disproportionately affected by the fall-out of the virus due to their overrepresentation in industries heavily hit by the economic downturn caused by COVID – industries like hospitality, food service and production, and retail.

The services provided by the legislature's commitment to refugees were designed to be flexible and adaptive to the unique needs of recently arrived communities. This flexibility allows refugee resettlement agencies to rapidly pivot. For example, we were able to create a one-of-a kind partnership with the OED by deputizing us to be unemployment insurance navigators. Additionally:

- we were able to respond to the food insecurity faced by hundreds of our clients and families;
- we supported the housing disruption by being sources of rental assistance and distribution;
- we were able to support increased domestic violence events;
- and we continue to support many other COVID-related challenges.

Few if any of these services would have been possible without the state's investment in this program. Included in my submitted materials is data and outcomes that clearly demonstrate the success of ECM. We're tracking self-sufficiency through a 13-domain matrix, and we're honored to share that 270 unique assessments capture the success in supporting refugee families in continuing to move towards thriving, despite a global pandemic.

As Oregon emerges from the pandemic, equitable and expanded investment in our refugee communities is necessary. \$4.5 million in funding will allow for these wrap-around supports to be provided to more, new Oregonians, and across more of the state. Importantly, it will support more of the positive, sustainable outcomes we've been able to demonstrate as part of our partnership.

We are proud to join in the support SB718, knowing that the funding will provide critical services to these communities who have been heavily hit by the pandemic to recover and rebuild.

On behalf of Catholic Charities of Oregon, and our partner agencies, I thank you for your support and for your historic dedication to refugees and asylees and for your understanding of the immeasurable contributions refugee families and communities continue to make in Oregon.

Sincerely,

Matthew Westerbeck

Director of Refugee Services

Catholic Charities of Oregon

March 30, 2021

## Catholic Charities

2740 SE Powell Blvd., #1  
Portland, Oregon 97202

**503.231.4866**

503.238.4716 *fax*

[www.CatholicCharitiesOregon.org](http://www.CatholicCharitiesOregon.org)