

THE 2025 CHILDREN'S AGENDA

OUR CHILDREN
Oregon
VOICES UNITED.
OPPORTUNITY REIMAGINED.

April 22, 2025

TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary
FROM: Grace Fortson, Our Children Oregon
SUBJECT: Support for SB 599 A

Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Chotzen and Wallan, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Grace Fortson, I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager with Our Children Oregon (OCO). OCO is a statewide nonprofit committed to whole child wellbeing through the Children's Agenda- a comprehensive legislative agenda created and supported by our over 135 member organizations across the state.

I am here to represent not only my own personal support of SB 599, but also the support of our entire Children's Agenda coalition who voted to prioritize this bill as a key way to support children and families this legislative session.

In 2020, I had the honor of participating in ethnographic research here in Oregon that focused on livelihoods of refugee women in Portland in the context of the pandemic. I interviewed one woman who recalled terrible instances of discrimination she faced due to her immigration status. While she was chasing the American Dream and pursuing an education while living in the U.S. with refugee status, some of her classmates would move away from her in class and refuse to speak to her. If this was her experience with peers, I can't imagine the intensity of discrimination she faced with those in positions of power in her life, including landlords. She specifically recognized

that her status as a refugee, and her broader social standing as a migrant, were the grounds of this discrimination.

Without the protections that SB 599 offers, we are failing migrant Oregonians and their children. To give a bit of context, 21% of children in Oregon come from immigrant families and 29% of children in immigrant families have resident parents that are not US citizens as of 2022¹. This is a highly significant population of youth here in Oregon that are vulnerable to increased housing instability without this bill. Unstable housing means more than just a move for our children. In Oregon, housing instability is linked to poor physical and mental health outcomes. Additionally, students navigating housing instability have 10% lower rates of attendance. When lower attendance rates combine with high school mobility, we see declining educational outcomes for youth².

The bill is modeled after a provision in local ordinance in the City of Portland that has been in effect for years, and extends that protection statewide, ensuring consistency of protections across all communities. Four other states have similar statewide protections (NY, WA, CA, IL). Removing immigration or citizenship status as a barrier helps stabilize families who may otherwise be at risk of eviction or homelessness due to discrimination, leading to more secure communities. Children need stability and Oregonians need protections. We urge a strong yes vote for SB 599.

Thank you,

Grace Fortson, Policy and Advocacy Manager Our Children Oregon
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¹<https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/115-children-in-immigrant-families?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/39/false/1095,2048,1729,37,871,870,573,869,36,868/any/445,446>

² <https://www.oregon.gov/ode/StudentSuccess/Documents/SNHResearchBrief1.pdf>