

March 30, 2021

Dear Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee:

My name is Isa Peña, and I am the Interim Executive Director of Causa, Oregon's immigrant rights organization who seeks to improve the lives of Latinx immigrants and their families through coalition building, civic engagement, advocacy and leadership development.

I am delighted to be able to submit testimony on behalf of Causa in support of Senate Bill 778: to create an Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement (OIRA) to support Oregon's collective prosperity. While the creation of this office may seem simple, it would be an incredible signal to immigrants and refugees across Oregon indicating that we value the contributions that immigrants make to our economy, our communities and to Oregon. At Causa, we envision a world where all people have the resources and opportunities needed to thrive. We envision an Oregon where we welcome and value the contributions, strengths and assets of Latino immigrants and their families-- and this would do just that.

With the creation of OIRA, organizations like Causa will work together with OIRA to provide both short and long term resources to support our immigrant and refugee communities. Oregon would be better equipped to make recommendations to overcome disparities and advance immigrant and refugee achievement. We would ensure that we are creating and advancing policies that benefit all Oregonians. Currently, we have over 110,000 immigrant Oregonians who contribute over \$4.2 billion dollars in taxes, but we offer limited resources to them because of their immigration status. We believe that creating the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement would help create a centralized place to ensure that policies and resources impacting these communities would be equitable across Oregon. We believe that the creation of this office would encourage civic engagement and the participation of immigrants in advocacy for our collective prosperity.

We have seen the devastation that COVID-19 had specifically for immigrant and BIPOC communities who make up a vast majority of our essential workforce. We saw the disproportionate COVID-19 infection rates. We want to ensure that we are meeting the needs of the most impacted individuals and valuing the contributions that immigrant and refugee Oregonians have made to our state and communities.

Causa has been advocating for immigrant rights for over 25 years and we hope that with the creation of this office, we can continue to advance immigrant rights together to ensure that all Oregonians have the resources and opportunities to thrive and because of this we urge you to support SB 778.



Isa Peña  
Interim Executive Director, Causa Oregon