



February 1, 2022

Subject: Yes on SB 1543 – Universal Legal Representation

From: Bridget Cooke, Executive Director of Adelante Mujeres

Chair Prosanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Bridget Cooke, and I am the Executive Director at Adelante Mujeres, which means “Women Rise Up.” We strongly support SB 1543, Universal Legal Representation.

Adelante Mujeres strongly supports SB 1543, Universal Legal Representation, which would provide immigrant Oregonians legal support during a traumatic and challenging process. Oregon’s immigrant community continues to remain in limbo and be vulnerable to deportation. Rather than furthering the hardships experienced, SB 1543 would be a pathway for more accessible, culturally responsive, and community-focused legal services.

Adelante Mujeres is a non-profit organization in Forest Grove. The agency has a rich history of successfully engaging low-income Latinx and immigrant communities by acting as a forum for community advocacy. Adelante Mujeres’ mission is to provide holistic education and empowerment opportunities to low-income Latina women and their families to ensure full participation and active leadership in the community. Our organization served over 13,000 individuals in 2021 with comprehensive and life-changing services—these services span from Educational, Microenterprise, and Leadership programs.

Nonetheless, our mission is not possible when immigrant women and their families live in constant fear due to immigration policies that lead to family separation. We have program participants whose family members have faced deportation for not having adequate legal representation due to not having financial resources or finding attorneys that would take cases of people already in a Detention Center.

According to the Oregon Center for Public Policy, one in every 10 Oregon children live with a family member without legal status. This statistic highlights why most of our program participants live under constant stress due to immigration policies that lead to family separation. In addition, through a series of listening sessions we hosted in 2019-2021, we identified that local ICE activities and deportations were the number one fear for the community. If a family faces deportation, we must reassure them that they will not be alone and that they will receive adequate resources and legal services that will help them navigate the complex and challenging process and allow them to fight for their case.



Over the past few years, we have provided case management to 15 individuals seeking asylum and nine deportation cases. Every person has expressed how important and urgent it is to access culturally specific, affordable, and local legal representation. We know that proper legal representation can make a big difference in a person's case. A community member without legal representation is 5.5 times more likely to be deported regardless of the merit of their case.

We know individuals who have been deported in the past due lack of financial resources to afford adequate legal representation. This situation must change. SB 1543 is the solution. This proposal would create a statewide call center that would provide direct legal contacts and streamline access for those seeking help. In addition, people will be given the power to choose their legal representative at a trusted local organization.

Another reason why we support this proposal is that Adelante Mujeres is a navigating agency for the Oregon Worker Relief Fund. Most people we have navigated through the fund are our neighbors in Washington County, who already trust and connect with the organization. We can build a similar system that allows our communities of color to communicate with the agencies they know and trust to help them during difficult times.

We must protect the rights of everyone who calls Oregon home and support their ability to thrive. By doing so, we can continue being a place that values families and communities. We strongly encourage you to support SB 1543. Immigrants and refugees are essential workers and business owners who contribute mightily to the state's cultural and economic vitality.

Sincerely,

Bridget Cooke
Executive Director, Adelante Mujeres
bcooke@adelantemujeres.org