



February 8, 2022

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 implementation
From: **Jordan Cummings, Innovation Law Lab**
Re: Support for Universal Representation SB1543

Chair Prosanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee: My name is Jordan Cummings and I am the Legal Director at Innovation Law Lab. I live in the city of Portland.

Equity Corps of Oregon started as a pilot program funded by the City of Portland and Multnomah County and then was later funded by the state in both 2019 and 2021. Over its tenure, the program has served over 1700 Oregonians. According to a recent report by the Oregon Center for Public Policy, deportation weakens the state's economy, harms families who lose wages following an immigration arrest, and, most devastatingly, wreaks psychological and financial harm on children who lose a parent to deportation. Indeed, the report estimates that deportation reduces the amount of financial support available to an estimated 3,500 Oregon children by \$196 million.

Representation by an attorney in immigration court can, and does, mitigate these harms, and lowers the risk of Oregonians being deported. Since its launch, the program has helped keep hundreds of Oregonian families together. Just a few of our hard-fought victories include:

- winning asylum for two young siblings who fled, alone, child abuse, sexual assault, and gang violence to seek safety with family in Oregon;
- winning asylum for a single mother and her young son in rural Oregon, who survived severe domestic violence; and
- winning cancellation of removal- a form of relief that allows a person to keep their lawful permanent residence in the US- for an Eastern Oregon mother who had lived in the US since she was an infant and who successfully recovered from a substance use disorder.

Without the Equity Corps pilot program, these people, and many others, would have been forced to face removal proceedings alone, greatly lowering their chances of avoiding deportation. The program needs continued and expanded support in order to continue to provide these vital services. Statewide support is crucial because over two-thirds (67%) of those served by Equity Corps reside outside of the city of Portland. Representation of rural Oregonians is especially crucial because many reside in areas where there are zero nonprofits or pro bono immigration legal services available, and maybe not even private immigration attorneys.

As an Oregonian, I am so proud that the state has supported this innovative and essential program during its early years. I urge you to continue the state's support so our immigrant friends and family can continue to call Oregon home.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Jordan Cunnings
Legal Director
Innovation Law Lab