



SUBJECT: Yes on SB 1543

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

My name is Kelsey Provo and I live in Portland, Oregon.

I am writing in support of SB1543, Universal Legal Representation, which would provide immigrant Oregonians with legal support during deportation proceedings. Despite a new president and administration, Oregon's immigrants are still very vulnerable to deportation which is why we need accessible, culturally responsive, and community focused legal services.

Immigrants in deportation proceedings are often forced to proceed with their cases alone, without the assistance of counsel, simply because they cannot afford an attorney. While many people in removal proceedings have valid legal claims to remain in the country, they are unable to articulate these claims without the assistance of counsel. Universal representation will safeguard due process by allowing immigrant Oregonians to access the rights afforded to them under existing law.

Legal representation in immigration proceedings matters. Representation by an attorney is the single most determinative factor in the outcome of a deportation proceeding and improves someone's chances of staying with their family by 457 percent.

Universal Legal Representation expands the successful Equity Corps pilot program funded by Multnomah County, the City of Portland, and the State of Oregon to create statewide infrastructure for immigration legal defense. The program will also prepare Oregon for any major changes in national immigration policy by creating community-led pathways to citizenship.

I am an immigration attorney and have worked within other universal representation systems outside of Oregon. In those systems, legal service providers could not meet the community's need for legal services because there weren't enough legal service providers to represent every community member in need of representation. When I worked within these other universal representation systems, I often had to tell people that I could not take their case even though they qualified for free legal representation because I and my organization did not have capacity to represent them. This was not only frustrating but heartbreaking.

SB1543 is truly innovative because it creates a universal representation system that is designed to scale so that it can meet the needs of our community. In my work with Equity Corps, I never had to turn away a community member who qualified for free legal services. This is because the Equity Corps model is designed to scale to meet the needs of the community and because it is based on a collaborative and centralized approach to legal representation.



Here are some key facts on Universal Legal Representation:

- The program would create a statewide call center that would provide direct contacts and streamline access for those seeking help.
- Community based organizations (CBOs) that already have deep connections to the community would oversee the program's policy and fiscal decisions and have an active coordinating role.
- The statewide representation team would embed lawyers with CBOs to ensure community members can turn to organizations they know and trust in times of need.

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. Oregon's approach to universal representation is unique and has the potential to make an incredible difference in the lives of our families and communities.

Thank you.

Kelsey Provo