



SUBJECT: Yes on SB 1543

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

My name is Andrea Gonzalez 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.

Representation by an attorney is the single most determinative factor in the outcome of a deportation proceeding. Representation by an attorney 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.

Oregon is home to hundreds of thousands of immigrants and refugees who live in urban and rural areas statewide. They are critical to the state's cultural and economic vitality. Immigrant Oregonians work in key Oregon industries, are essential workers, and own small businesses that contribute to the vibrancy of our communities.

I have been supporting the migrant communities throughout their immigration court for about 5 years. I have seen the difficulties my clients face everyday. How they are expected to survive without the ability to work and still are required to pay court fees and private representation. I have seen how my clients struggle to put food on their table, and of course for them the possibility of hiring private representation is not in reach. I see the pressure this puts in them and in their family. Everyone deserves a fair shot at fighting their case.

Legal representation during deportation proceedings is crucial for immigrant communities. A community member without legal representation is 5.5 times more likely to be deported, regardless of the merit of their case. Currently only 37% of all immigrants and 14% of detained immigrants are represented by an attorney in immigration court. Universal Representation would ensure that all Oregonians facing deportation can receive the legal advice they need.

We've already seen this kind of community-focused system in action. By taking the lessons learned from the Oregon Worker Relief Fund model, we can build a system that allows our communities of color to connect with the organizations they know and trust to help them during this difficult time.



All Oregonians should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of where they were born. But Oregonians who are immigrants and refugees, especially immigrant Oregonians who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, have faced increased immigration enforcement that involves racial profiling, detention, family separation, and potential removal to countries where they have fled violence and persecution.

Deportations tear apart immigrant families of color, disrupt our communities and damage our economy. Immigrant inclusion strengthens our communities and contributes to our collective prosperity. 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.

Thank you for your consideration,

Andrea Gonzalez