



Feb. 9, 2022

**Testimony of Leland Baxter-Neal, Director of Advocacy
On Behalf of Latino Network
In Support of SB 1543
Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation**

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

For the record, my name is Leland Baxter-Neal and I am the Director of Advocacy at Latino Network. Latino Network is a culturally-specific nonprofit serving Latinx youth and families in Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties. Our organization provides transformative services to more than 10,000 Latinx youth, families, and community members in multiple areas including education, family stability, housing support, and advocacy.

Unlike in criminal court, those in deportation proceedings in immigration court are not guaranteed representation by an attorney if they cannot afford one. The lack of legal representation results in Oregonians with a lawful right to remain in the United States being routinely deported. While an immigration court decision *should* rely on a close analysis of the particular facts and law of the case, we know that the most outcome-determinative factor is simply whether or not an individual or family facing deportation is represented by an attorney.

When an individual prevails in their immigration case, Oregon wins—an Oregonian who qualifies under federal law to remain a part of their community and our workforce is able to remain here. An Oregon family is not faced with the heart-wrenching decision between leaving their home or confronting the trauma of family separation.

SB 1543 is about one central concept: allowing those with a lawful right to remain in this country to have the ability to present their case to an immigration judge, and ensuring that the immigration judge makes a decision of potentially devastating consequences based on all of the facts and the law.

As you have heard, this bill is a further expansion of a successful pilot program called Equity Corps of Oregon (ECO) that was launched in 2017-2018 with funds from Multnomah County and the City of Portland. The pilot has protected over 1,000 Oregonians from deportation, and there are currently over 1,100 people enrolled for services through the pilot program.

SB 1543 would further expand this pilot program statewide, ensuring that all Oregonians in need of immigration legal services across the state would receive the appropriate services at the right time. To provide these essential services, the bill creates a program to offer navigation, wraparound services, and legal representation through a two-sided, coordinated system.

The first side focuses on community-based services and support, and would be administered by the nonprofit *Oregon Worker Relief* (OWR). This side of the program would feature an expansion of immigration legal services by placing immigration attorneys in community-based organizations around the state. These organizations are often where immigrant and refugee communities already receive services. While the vast majority of immigration legal services, especially low-cost services, are concentrated in the Portland metro area, there are culturally-specific organizations serving immigrant and refugee communities in rural counties and small towns around the state that could benefit from a nonprofit immigration attorney in their community. The program would also expand and strengthen the statewide network of community navigators that has been established and built up through the ECO pilot and the highly successful Oregon Worker Relief Fund administered by OWR. These navigators would be able to assist community members enroll in the Universal Representation program. Program participants would also be eligible for a client services fund that would cover case-related expenses such as application fees and document translation costs, among others.

To ensure an effective use of resources and systemwide coordination, a centralized entity referred to in the bill as the “clearinghouse” would provide income and program eligibility screening, logistical support, case placement, and legal mentoring and supervision to the community-based attorneys, among other services.

On the second side of the system, the Oregon State Bar will administer funds to expand the capacity of existing nonprofit legal service providers. Cases taken on either side of the system will be tracked and coordinated through the centralized clearinghouse.

Rigorous front-end and back-end reporting and auditing requirements are written into the statute to ensure transparency and accountability for the provided services and expended

funds. The Legislature will also receive an annual report detailing how the system is operating.

SB 1543 is a flexible and scalable approach to a problem that has plagued the immigrant and refugee community in Oregon for too long. Latino Network urges your strong support of SB 1543.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in orange ink, reading "Leland Baxter-Neal". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Leland Baxter-Neal

Director of Advocacy - Latino Network