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Feb. 8, 2021

**Testimony of Antonio Ramirez  
On Behalf of Latino Network  
In Support of SB 1543  
Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110 Implementation**

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

My name is Antonio Ramirez Subiria, and I write in support of SB 1543.

I have lived in Oregon for more than 20 years. In that time, most of my work has been with Oregon's immigrant community, a community of which I am also a part, as I am an immigrant to this country.

For the past seven years, I have worked at Latino Network, where my role is dedicated to providing support to families and individuals in Oregon's immigrant community by helping them navigate state and local systems and connect with resources. This has included connecting families with immigration legal services, including those offered by the Equity Corps of Oregon pilot project, also known as ECO.

ECO is a project that was launched in the Multnomah County area to provide low-income community members with free legal representation in their deportation proceedings. What made this program unique and special since its inception is that it not only provides legal services, but also intentionally offers the opportunity for clients to be connected to other resources in the community, so they can meet other needs that originate from their vulnerable immigration status.

If passed, SB 1543 would strengthen, expand, and solidify the ECO program into a statewide system. I have seen the tremendous benefit of the ECO program in the community I serve, and I write to share my perspective and urge the committee to pass SB 1543.

Since ECO's launch in 2018, I have assisted families and vulnerable community members apply for the program and have seen how critical a resource the program has been for many of my clients. To understand its importance, it's important to understand how things were before ECO. Prior to the program's launch, there were almost no low-cost legal services available for individuals in deportation proceedings. I saw families searching for someone to represent them and not finding any help. Although there are nonprofit organizations in the Portland area that provide immigration

legal services, before ECO they took very few deportation cases. The demand is larger than they can meet, and many cases ended up rejected. This has been a problem for the community for a long time.

If ECO didn't exist, it would be very hard for the families that I work with to access legal representation in their deportation proceedings. With the launch of this pilot project, however, I have referred more than 72 families, and I would estimate that at least 90% of them were accepted into the program. The number of individuals impacted and assisted is so much larger, as each family represents multiple people.

Importantly, ECO's partnerships with community-based organizations like Latino Network, which would continue in the Universal Representation program, ensuring that families have access to a wide range of services, including culturally responsive services that are critical for our immigrant families. The need for legal services in the immigrant community is huge, but it is not the only need our community has.

For example, I have now been working with one particular family for more than two years. I was providing a community training that discussed ECO when a woman approached me looking for assistance. She was a single mother with two children who had all fled Honduras and were applying for asylum in the United States. I assisted her in applying for the ECO program, and her case was accepted. When I met her, she did not have a work permit and was nearly at the point of homelessness, and was afraid she and her two children would end up on the streets.

Through the ECO program she got legal representation and was able to successfully apply for a work permit, find reliable work, and bring stability to her family. In addition, her two children are now enrolled in programming at Latino Network and I have been able to continue supporting this family and connecting them with resources, including energy and food assistance and economic stability assistance during the worst of the pandemic. The mother of this family is now interested in receiving vocational training from one of Latino Network programs. She wants to continue developing the skills that will allow her to have a better paid job. Now, she is looking for more and better life opportunities like any other Oregonian can do.

SB 1543 would improve upon the ECO pilot project by expanding and strengthening its services, meaning more families like this one around the state can find the stability and peace of mind necessary to work and participate in their communities. Access to legal representation helps alleviate the fear and stress of not knowing where to turn for help. It prevents family separation and allows community members to step out from the shadows.

SB 1543 can continue supporting the most vulnerable immigrant and refugee communities by making legal services accessible to them. If families live under the fear of deportation, not only those families suffer, our communities suffer as well. SB1543 gives hope to many individuals that are already part of our communities and productive members of our economy and society.

For these reasons, and more, I urge this committee to vote yes on SB 1543.