



February 8, 2022

SUBJECT: Yes on SB 1543

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

My name is Benjamin Grass. I am the Deputy Director of Operations for Innovation Law Lab, an Oregon-based nonprofit that leverages law, technology and organizing to advance immigrant and refugee rights. I write in support of SB 1543.

I have been fortunate to work on the Equity Corps of Oregon program since its inception, the often-described "pilot" precursor to SB 1543- known to our clients simply as "ECO". Since its start in 2018, ECO has provided free legal services to over 1700 individuals, including over 750 children (100 of whom are unaccompanied minors), from over 25 Oregon counties. These clients represent over 36 countries and speak 19 different languages.

I have been equally as fortunate to collaborate with Oregon Worker Relief and the dozens of Community Based Organizations working tirelessly to support ECO clients while building resilient, prosperous and powerful immigrant communities- through the Worker Relief Fund, the Quarantine Fund, and the Small Enterprise Fund. Over the last 22 months Oregon Worker Relief has distributed nearly \$100 million dollars to the otherwise excluded businesses, workers and families that weave Oregon's now rich tapestry- certainly no small feat in these challenging times.

Today however, I do not write on behalf of Equity Corps of Oregon or Oregon Worker Relief. I write on behalf of my wife, who is a Spanish Language and Literature teacher at a high-poverty public school in North Portland. Her students and their families are our clients, and the countless stories she details to me of her students falling desperately behind are both normalized and preventable. Parents who can't drop their kids off for fear of being pulled over by police, teenagers who miss school because of work in order to contribute to family finances, family members detained and deported, lack of access to internet and technology, and dropping out altogether because the weight of it all is just too much.

1 in 10 Oregon children live with an undocumented family member, and we know that deportations tear apart immigrant families of color, disrupt our communities and damage our state's economy. If a family's breadwinner is deported, family members face housing and food insecurity. Children must cope with the incredible trauma of family separation, with long-lasting psychological impacts. Children's school attendance and performance are also negatively affected, increasing their likelihood of dropping out and earning significantly less as adults.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Narrowing the Gap: A Report from the Oregon Worker Relief coalition After a Year of Pandemic, Oregon Worker Relief (2021).*



As the father of two young children, 2 and 4 years old, I could not stay somewhere that does not accept us, a place that makes our daily lives more tenuous and intentionally less safe. And, I simply cannot comprehend the paralyzing effect of being forcibly separated from them. The freedom from which is not lost on me, but also begs the question, why not here?

I want to teach my kids that being an immigrant isn't something less than any of us. That Oregon is a state where all people, regardless of their immigration status, are afforded the resources and opportunities needed to thrive, and that irrespective of where you are from - not because of - you will be treated with dignity and respect. I want them to know that immigrant inclusion strengthens our communities and contributes to our collective prosperity. SB 1543 is the clear next step to incorporate all that we have learned from Oregon's challenging past and recent reckoning, of where we've come from and where we are going. We owe it to this and the next generation of Oregonians and I urge you to continue making Oregon more fair, more inclusive and more prosperous by passing SB 1543.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Benjamin Grass". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Benjamin Grass  
Deputy Director of Operations  
Innovation Law Lab

<sup>1</sup>*Narrowing the Gap: A Report from the Oregon Worker Relief coalition After a Year of Pandemic, Oregon Worker Relief (2021).*