



February 8, 2022

To: Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110
implementation
From: **Isa Peña, Innovation Law Lab**
Re: Support for Universal Representation SB 1543

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee:

My name is Isa Peña and I am the Director of Strategy at Innovation Law Lab, an Oregon-based nationally recognized non-profit that leverages advocacy, technology and law for immigrant and refugee justice. I am writing in support of SB 1543.

SB1543 establishes a Universal Representation system that would provide legal representation to Oregonians who are at risk of deportation or need an attorney for affirmative immigration cases and cannot afford representation. Unlike in criminal court, individuals facing deportation in civil immigration court are not guaranteed access to an attorney. Because of this, immigrants with a lawful right to remain in the United States are routinely deported because they have no way to make their case in court. This bill seeks to do one thing: ensure that no Oregonian facing deportation goes through that process without legal representation.

As the daughter of two hardworking undocumented Oregonians, I feel the desperation and immense fear everyday that my parents will be deported, and my family separated. This fear keeps me up at night, is with me when I wake up, and I feel it at birthday parties, at weddings, on holidays when we should be celebrating – there is fear always about losing my family. This has happened to so many in Oregon. It is unfair and unjust.

Sadly, I am not alone. One in every 10 Oregon children have at least one parent who is undocumented and likely face the same fears and emotional harms that I have endured and that my family has endured.

Universal Representation would change that. Instead of feeling fear, I would feel like Oregon has my back and the backs of my hardworking parents who have labored and contributed to our collective prosperity. SB 1543 means my family, like other immigrant families in Oregon, have a fighting chance at staying together, building community, and contributing to Oregon.

SB 1543 would:

- Create a statewide call center that would streamline the already complicated process of seeking immigration legal services;
- Enable community navigators to accompany individuals throughout the process;



- Allow community based organizations that already have deep ties with the immigrant community to embed lawyers in their organizations to provide a community centered approach to legal services and provide more services outside of the Portland Metro and Willamette Valley;
- Add capacity to the already existing non-profit legal service providing organizations through the Oregon State Bar; and
- Create a client service fund to assist individuals with legal fees and translation

This bill builds on the extremely successful Equity Corps of Oregon pilot program and takes lessons from the innovative community-based delivery system that is Oregon Worker Relief.

This bill provides a streamlined, systemic and innovative way in exactly what our immigrant community needs to propose. 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, meaning that having an attorney can make or break a case. Oregon is a place where immigrants and refugees are an integral part of the state's social fabric, history, and economy. Immigrant Oregonians work in key Oregon industries, are essential workers, and own small businesses that contribute to the vibrancy of our communities.

At its core, this bill is about due process and justice. All Oregonians are entitled to due process, and this bill will only ensure that immigrant and refugee Oregonians have access to immigration counsel. All Oregonians should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of where they were born. I urge you to support SB 1543 and stay true to Oregon's values.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Isa Peña". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Isa Peña
Director of Strategy
Innovation Law Lab