



A STRONG VOICE FOR OREGON'S WORKERS

TO: Chair Prozanski
Vice-Chair Thatcher
Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

FR: Catie Theisen, Oregon AFL-CIO

RE: SB 1543, Support for Universal Representation

February 9, 2022

The Oregon AFL-CIO represents 300,000 workers across Oregon and is a voice for all workers in the legislative process, including workers of all nationalities and citizenship statuses. The Oregon AFL-CIO strongly supports SB 1543, which would ensure Oregon's immigrants have access to legal representation during deportation proceedings.

1 in 8 workers in Oregon is an immigrant¹ -- many of whom have continued to work round-the-clock during COVID-19 to keep food on our tables, to care for our loved ones, and to keep our economy running. But Oregonians who are immigrants and refugees have faced increased immigration enforcement that includes racial profiling, detention, family separation, and potential removal to countries where they fled violence and persecution.

For far too many with valid legal claims to remain in Oregon, that is solely determined by legal counsel – representation by an attorney improves someone's chances of staying with their family and at their job by 457%. SB 1543 expands the successful Equity Corps pilot program to create statewide infrastructure for immigration legal defense. Universal representation safeguards due process by allowing immigrant Oregonians to access the rights afforded to them under existing law.

By taking the lessons learned from the Oregon Worker Relief Fund model, we can build a similar system that allows our communities of color to connect with the organizations they already know and trust to help them during this difficult time. And 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. The program will also prepare Oregon for any major changes in national immigration policy by creating community-led pathways to citizenship.

Immigrant Oregonians disproportionately work in some of the industries hardest hit by COVID-19 and some that have been most essential during the pandemic, including manufacturing, food service, and agriculture. They are a critical part of our families, communities and economy. They should have legal representation when they are facing possible deportation. On behalf of the Oregon AFL-CIO and as a member of the Fair Shot for all coalition, we urge your YES vote on SB 1543.

¹ <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-oregon>