

SUBJECT: Yes on SB 1543

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

My name is Rebecca Pearson and I live in rural Jackson County and I work with the Rogue Action Center here in Southern Oregon.

I am writing in support of SB 1543 which would provide immigrant Oregonians with legal support during deportation proceedings. 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.

Many people in removal proceedings have valid legal claims to remain in the country and continue to contribute to Oregon's communities, but have no way to articulate these claims without the assistance of counsel. This bill safeguards due process by allowing immigrant Oregonians to access the rights afforded to them under existing law.

Representation by an attorney is the single most outcome determinative factor in deportation proceedings. Representation by an attorney improves someone's chances of staying with their family by 457 percent.

SB 1543 further expands the successful Equity Corps pilot program funded by Multnomah County, the City of Portland, and the State of Oregon to create statewide infrastructure for immigration legal defense.

Oregon is home to thousands of immigrants and refugees who live in urban and rural areas statewide, and are critical to the state's cultural and economic vitality. Immigrant Oregonians work in key Oregon industries, are essential workers, and own small businesses that contribute to the vibrancy of our communities.

Here in Southern Oregon the Rogue Action Center works closely with fire survivors from the 2020 Almeda and Obenchain fires that devastated our community. In the process of navigating support for those families and individuals we often hear about other challenges that some of our community members face, especially families with mixed documentation. According to the Oregon Center for Public Policy, one in every 10 Oregon children live with a family member without legal status.

The passage of SB 1543 would go far to support fire survivors as well as our friends and neighbors who have been left without legal representation when facing the threat of deportation. We know that someone without a lawyer is five and half times more likely to be deported regardless of the merits of their case.

All Oregonians should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of where they were born. But Oregonians who are immigrants and refugees, especially immigrant Oregonians who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, have faced increased immigration enforcement that includes racial profiling, detention, family separation, and potential removal to countries where they have fled violence and persecution.

It's past time to protect the rights of everyone who calls Oregon home and support their ability to thrive. By doing so, we can continue being a place that values families and communities.

Thank you.

Rebecca Pearson
Field Director & Interim Co-Director

ROGUE ACTION CENTER