



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

For the record, my name is Cameron Coval and I am the Executive Director of Pueblo Unido PDX. Pueblo Unido is a nonprofit organization that provides legal service navigation for the Universal Representation program established by SB 1543 in the 2022 session.

Legal representation is essential to ensuring due process and equitable access to justice for all Oregonians. In immigration court, however, respondents with limited financial means are not appointed a legal representative like they would be in criminal court. Rather, respondents in immigration court must either hire their own legal representative (which often costs \$12,000-\$15,000) or represent themselves in proceedings that are conducted in English, that involve complex and constantly-changing legal concepts, and that can carry stakes as high as permanent banishment from the United States, family separation, and sometimes, life or death. The government, on the other hand, is always represented in these proceedings by trained immigration attorneys seeking to deport the respondent. As a result of this imbalance, immigrant Oregonians who have fled violence, persecution, and extreme poverty, and who have a lawful right to remain in this country, are routinely being deported simply because they cannot afford an attorney. Universal Representation seeks to address this glaring injustice and ensure that all Oregonians have access to legal representation and a fair trial in immigration court.

To ensure that Oregonians are able to access Universal Representation, the system needs organizations to raise awareness of its services, to navigate (enroll) individuals in need into the program, and to support them through the immigration process. Pueblo Unido has provided these services for Equity Corps of Oregon, the pilot precursor to Universal Representation, since its launch in 2018. When Oregonians approach our organization with a legal need, we immediately navigate them into the program to connect them to legal services, and we remain an access point for resources and information throughout their journey through the immigration process. To date, our navigation services have connected more than 800 Oregonians to legal assistance through Equity Corps of Oregon, which has helped keep families together and ensure that immigrant Oregonians who contribute to our collective prosperity are given due process.

Our streamlined navigation services to the Universal Representation system ensure that Oregonians are able to access potentially life-saving immigration legal services when they need them. In the 2023 session, the Legislature has the opportunity to appropriate additional funding to this crucial program through the passage of SB 627. We strongly urge the Legislature to take this step to continue supporting Universal Representation.

Sincerely,
Cameron Coval
Executive Director
Pueblo Unido PDX