



February 5, 2024

TO: House Committee on Early Childhood and Human Services
FROM: Our Children Oregon
RE: Support for HB 4085, Legal Aid for Citizenship and Immigration

Dear Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, and Members of the Committee,

Our Children Oregon's (OCO) mission is advancing equitable policymaking and whole-child advocacy statewide to ensure our children and youth—regardless of their race, identity, ability, or where they live— have what they need to thrive. We collect, analyze, and elevate data and research that, alongside lived experience, drives conversations in support of Oregon's future. **We strongly support HB 4085 because the ability to access legal immigration status is vital to immigrant and refugee families' mental and physical health, and overall ability to thrive.**

According to KIDS COUNT Data Center from 2022, 21% of children in Oregon come from immigrant families and 29% of children in immigrant families have resident parents that are not US citizens¹. Additionally, 1 in 10 Oregonians is an immigrant and 69% of this population is eligible for a more permanent legal status.² When immigrants and refugees struggle with fear and stress over their legal status, they may experience health deterioration and are at increased risk for developing PTSD, anxiety, depression, cancer, or diabetes, for example. These health consequences make it difficult to access opportunities and provide for children in these communities.

OCO supports HB 4085 to explicitly define immigration legal services as health services and immigration legal service providers as health practitioners. This bill calls for DHS to allocate grants to help noncitizens get lawful immigration status. When immigrants and refugees' legal status are prioritized, this can lead to more job mobility, more financial stability, and more housing stability, which results in improved health outcomes. Additionally, when immigrant Oregonians are able to secure their deserved legal status, they can obtain OHP and Medicaid, leading to improved access to vital health resources. Immigrant and refugee children and children with immigrant or refugee caretakers can have more capacity to thrive when their families' needs are met.

¹ <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data?location=USA#USA/2/0/char/3>

² <https://drive.google.com/file/d/13AqllK7-iWkFBY05Uafdq3snVZHfL4n/view>

Immigrants and refugees are important members of our communities, and we must recognize the connection between rights to legal status and access to quality healthcare. We thank you for your time and efforts to improve the wellbeing of children and families in Oregon. We urge your support of HB 4085.

From the Our Children Oregon Team,

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