

Submitter: Jennifer Van Meter
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB703

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

My Name is Jennifer Van Meter and I am a small-business owner in Portland, Oregon.

I'm writing to voice my hearty support for SB 703/HB 2788: Pathways to Protection and Citizenship. SB 703 allocates money to the Department of Human Services to award grants to nonprofit legal service providers that cover the cost of clients legal services. This is a bill that will save and strengthen families, improve outcomes in ODHS programs, bolster our workforce, and strengthen the general fund by helping immigrants transition from state services like Healthier Oregon to OHP. When my immigrant neighbors have access to legal counsel and sound advice, they feel less precarious, and I know every Oregon family has known at some point how hard it is to engage and connect with community when one is feeling uncertain or afraid. People do better, participate more, and form deeper ties when they feel secure.

Up to 1/3 of Oregonians without an immigration status are actually eligible under federal law for an immigration status. That is over 25,000 Oregonians who, but for the high cost of legal services, are living in fear, out of the employment mainstream, and unable to support their families. Immigrant and refugee communities make up more than 13% of our state's workforce, yet legal costs prevent many Oregonians from obtaining a more secure immigration status. I am eager to see my tax dollars go toward allocations that make Oregon safer, healthier, and more stable for all who live here.

I have lived in the United States my entire life, and in Oregon for almost thirty years. I have professional colleagues and friends who are a treasured part of my Oregon community who themselves have struggled to access affordable legal advice around issues concerning immigration status. When I've had the means, I've sometimes helped a friend with a loan or finding a referral, and have personally witnessed the relief people feel when they know they are getting sound legal counsel.

Thank you for your attention and for standing with all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Van Meter

Portland, Oregon