

RE: SB 703/HB 2788
TO: Chair Prozanski
Vice-Chair Thatcher
Members of the Committee
DATE: March 18, 2025

My name is Julia Spence. I am a 40-year active member of First Unitarian Church of Portland and am the retired VP of Human Resources for Neil Kelly Co. Design/Build Remodeling located in Portland, Bend, Eugene, and Seattle – one of Oregon's first B-Corporations. I serve not only on Neil Kelly Co.'s Board of Directors, but also on the Board of Directors for Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon.

I enthusiastically support SB 703 / HB 2788, Pathways to Protection and Citizenship. SB 703 allocates money to the Department of Human Services to award grants to non-profit 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 to transition from state services like Healthier Oregon to OHP. Ecumenical Ministries has a many-years-long successful history as one of those non-profits, having assisted many new Oregonians to settle and find safe and prosperous lives in our state. EMO's SOAR Legal Program has a proven track record as do other non-profit programs around the state.

Up to one-third 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. As a former HR Manager for a construction company, I am aware of the large number of people coming to Oregon with solid construction skills in a time when those workers are needed. We have a housing crisis and we have the opportunity to help people who want to work in Oregon to be set on the pathway to do just that. Neil Kelly Company has employed immigrants from Viet Nam, Mexico, Cuba, Central American countries, Ukraine, Russia, China, and beyond. My own brother-in-law brought his construction skills with him from Mexico many years ago and now holds an executive position in a local construction materials company.

My grandmother, the daughter of immigrants, taught Civics and American Citizenship classes for nearly 50 years. She saw it not only as part of her civic duty, but as a core element of her Christian faith. We were raised to help those in need with whatever tools and talents we have.

I support this bill as pragmatic, sensible, and the right thing to do. I support this bill as both a person of faith and a business person.

Thank you for your time to read this, and for standing up for vulnerable Oregonians.

Sincerely,
Julia Banner Spence
VP Retired Neil Kelly Company
Board Member Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon
Member First Unitarian Church of Portland