



Re S.B. 703

SENATE COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

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Testimony submitted by:

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Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Committee,

Thank you to Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary for the opportunity to submit testimony on Oregon Senate Bill 703 (SB 703)/ House Bill 2788 (HB 2788), the Pathways to Protection and Citizenship Act. I am the Senior Policy Counsel at the Refugee Advocacy Lab and the International Refugee Assistance Project (IRAP). I submit this joint statement on behalf of both organizations.

The [Refugee Advocacy Lab](#) (Lab) is a partnered initiative co-led by IRAP, Refugees International and Refugee Congress. The Lab's mission is to grow the movement for U.S. leadership on welcoming refugees and other forcibly displaced people by developing strategic communications resources, championing inclusive policies, and building capacity for the field. In Oregon, the Lab works closely with our partners at the Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon to support policies that reduce barriers for refugees and other newcomers to thrive. We have supported several initiatives and bills in Oregon, and have lauded this state as an important example for others seeking to enhance the contributions of refugees and other newcomers by helping them succeed in their new communities.

SB 703/HB 2788 allocates much-needed funding to the Department of Human Services to award grants to nonprofit legal service providers that cover the cost of clients' legal

services. Nonprofit legal services are crucial to ensuring not only that individuals' fundamental rights are protected, but also that our legal systems function as designed. Ample evidence establishes that access to legal services benefits everybody, from adjudicators to applicants. Everyday, through IRAP's direct work with clients, we see the transformational impact that legal representation can have on families and their communities. While IRAP provides free legal services to displaced people worldwide, it does not rely on government funding, but many critical local service providers here in Oregon do.

Beyond the intrinsic necessity for access to legal services to have a functional legal system, this is a moment of heightened need. Communities are grappling with unprecedented mass deportation and status revocation policies, while the Trump administration is expressly weaponizing immigration issues to challenge the very rule of law. Oregonians, especially those that can least afford it, deserve to have access to due process and legal representation in their immigration matters. Without legal support, Oregon stands to lose long-time residents who live, work, pay taxes and are an essential part of the fabric of communities across this state.

[More than half](#) of foreign-born Oregonians have become U.S. citizens since immigrating to the United States. The overwhelming majority of immigrant Oregonians value becoming naturalized citizens, fully participating in the privileges of citizenship. However, there remain tens of thousands of Oregonians, including [108,000](#) long-time residents, who lack immigration documentation and are unable to pursue a path to permanent status due to a lack of affordable legal services. One out of 15 children in Oregon are in a household with someone whose immigration status is vulnerable, and this number stands to increase exponentially under this administration's policies. This bill would assist thousands of Oregonians access affordable legal services by providing grants to eligible individuals based on income.

Access to legal representation can significantly increase positive outcomes for Oregonians. Indeed, a data analysis of outcomes from immigration court proceedings show that individuals from Oregon who have legal representation experience positive outcomes by up to [6.8 times](#) more than those without. Unfortunately, [almost half](#) of all cases currently pending in immigration court in Oregon are without legal presentation. In fact, Oregonians struggle to obtain legal representation, with less than 2% of practicing immigration attorneys across the United States located in the state.

Crucially, adequate access to legal services benefits Oregon itself, not just the individual immigrants who gain legal representation. [Several studies have](#) shown that access to permanent legal status leads to improved economic mobility and outcomes for immigrant families, and ultimately, the communities in which they reside. As Oregon confronts population declines and significant labor shortages, the state must do all it can to ensure those that here can safely stay. Passing SB 703/HB 2788 will keep families together, bolster the workforce, and ultimately, benefit the state through improved social/health outcomes and tax revenues.

As the Trump administration carries out its agenda of mass deportations and increasingly targets new populations previously protected, it is especially important for states and localities to protect their residents and ensure they can continue to contribute to the communities they call home. We hope, when the time comes, you will vote in favor of this bill, and continue Oregon's growing legacy of supporting its immigrant and refugee communities. Thank you for your time and for standing with all Oregonians.