

Submitter: Elena Barreto
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB703

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

At the Children's Institute we leverage research, practice, policy, and advocacy to shift systems toward justice for families so that all of Oregon's children, prenatal to grade 5, have access to opportunity.

We enthusiastically support SB 703, the Pathways to Protection and Citizenship Act. 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.

Every child has the right to thrive, and all families—regardless of income or background—need and deserve support in raising their children. We do not need a personal connection to a child to understand that the decisions we make now will have a lasting impact on their lives. We are collectively responsible for creating and sustaining an environment that supports children and their family's safety and well-being.

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, due to 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 from obtaining a more secure immigration status.

SB 703 ensures that all non-citizen Oregonians have access to immigration legal services and freedom from family separation and deportation. Thank you for your time and for standing with all Oregonians.

Elena Barreto,
Children's Institute