



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

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Oregon (ACLU of Oregon). A nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to defending and advancing democracy, civil liberties, and civil rights, and with over 44,000 members and donor supporters statewide.

**We support Senate Bill 703 (SB 703), the Pathways to Protection and Citizenship Act, which directs the Department of Human Services (DHS) to provide grants to nonprofit service providers assisting noncitizens in changing their immigration status or obtaining lawful permanent resident status.**

**Oregon has a longstanding commitment to supporting immigrants and refugees, exemplified by DHS's collaboration with nonprofit organizations to deliver essential services.** For years, DHS has worked with community-based legal service providers to assist individuals seeking refugee and immigration status adjustments, offering medical, employment, and other vital support services.<sup>1</sup> SB 703 builds upon this existing relationship by expanding access to legal services and ensuring that more Oregonians who are eligible for citizenship or lawful status can navigate the complex immigration system with proper legal representation.

**However, recent federal budget cuts under the Trump administration have jeopardized these vital services.** Many nonprofit legal service providers, such as SOAR Immigration Legal Services, have lost federal funding for citizenship classes and legal support.<sup>2</sup> Without state intervention, thousands of Oregonians who are already eligible for legal status will remain in limbo, unable to afford the legal services required to apply for citizenship, permanent residency, or work authorization. These cuts are part of a broader federal effort to undermine immigrant communities by restricting access to legal pathways that are fundamental to community stability and economic participation.

**The impact of SB 703 is significant. Up to one-third of Oregonians without an immigration status—more than 25,000 individuals—are actually eligible under federal law for a secure legal status but are unable to obtain it due to the high cost of legal services.**<sup>3</sup> As a result, these individuals live in fear, and are pushed into the margins of the labor market. Many of them have lived in Oregon for years, working in industries that are essential to our economy, paying taxes, and contributing to their communities.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, they remain unable to access the legal resources needed to adjust their immigration status.

**Without action, Oregon risks leaving thousands of lawful permanent residents and other eligible immigrants unprotected, forcing them to navigate complex legal processes alone—increasing the likelihood of unjust deportation, economic instability, and family separation.** SB 703 provides a proactive solution by funding nonprofit legal service providers to offer free and low-cost citizenship classes, provide legal representation for immigrants facing obstacles in obtaining work permits or permanent residency. These services not only strengthen Oregon's economy but also create stronger stable communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon Department of Human Services. *Refugee Services and Assistance*.

<sup>2</sup> SOAR Immigration Legal Services. *Impact of Federal Funding Cuts on Citizenship Classes and Legal Aid*.

<sup>3</sup> KGW News. *Oregon Lawmakers Push Bill to Fund Immigrant Legal Services*.

<sup>4</sup> Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees. *Economic Contributions of Immigrants in Oregon and Washington*. [gciir.org](http://gciir.org)

**SB 703 is not just about legal services—it is an investment in Oregon’s future.** Citizenship and work authorization unlock better wages, stable employment, and full participation in civic life, strengthening Oregon as a whole. Oregonians value protecting our communities. Immigrant Oregonians are our teachers, farmworkers, healthcare providers, business owners and more. They are our neighbors, friends, and colleagues. They pay taxes, contribute to our communities, and help drive our economy. Yet, without access to legal services, they remain vulnerable to exploitation, fear, and economic instability.

**SB 703 is a pragmatic, Oregon-led solution that aligns with the values Oregonians hold dear: fairness, dignity, and opportunity.** It works to support that all Oregonians—including immigrant Oregonians—can live, work, and contribute to our communities without fear. As the Trump administration escalates attacks on immigrant communities and slashes funding for legal aid, Oregon must take a stand. By passing SB 703, we reaffirm Oregon’s commitment to fairness, opportunity, and dignity—ensuring that all eligible Oregonians, regardless of where they were born, have a pathway to stability and citizenship.

Oregon must act now. **We urge the committee to support and pass SB 703 to protect families, strengthen our workforce, and uphold Oregon’s values.**

Respectfully,

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