

Submitter: Kenneth Crouse
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Joint Committee On Ways and Means
Measure, Appointment or Topic: HB5006

Co-Chair Lieber, Co-Chair Sanchez, and Members of the Committee,

I urge your strong support of the Immigrant Justice Package. We need to fund the programs in this package which protect our neighbors, strengthen our workforce, and create a state where everyone can thrive.

My name is Kenneth Crouse and I live in Lebanon, Oregon. I am a member of First Congregational UCC in Corvallis, and I have volunteered with the Oregon Community Asylum Network (OCAN) for over six years.

I am writing to support SB 149, Oregon's New Neighbors Coordinated Access Act, because across Oregon, immigrant families face daily hardships. They often go hungry because they're excluded from food assistance, while farmworkers risk their lives during climate disasters to provide for their children. Indigenous language speakers are unable to access life-saving medical care, and children often face deportation proceedings without legal help.

I want to focus on one key aspect of SB 149, the continuation of funding for Universal Representation. I lobbied for the passage of HB 3230 in 2023 because immigrants needing legal assistance who could not afford to hire a private immigration attorney had few options available. There were not enough pro-bono attorneys to meet the need. With the passage of HB 3230 funding became available through Equity Corp of Oregon (ECO) to provide attorneys that could go to immigration court and represent immigrants at their hearings.

This has made a huge difference for the immigrants who are being served by OCAN. Most of them are asylum seekers and their cases can be complex and difficult. Data has shown that having a competent immigration attorney at their Final Hearing can increase the likelihood of winning asylum by five-fold. Most of the asylum seekers supported by OCAN cannot afford a private attorney. OCAN has tried to raise money to pay for initial consultations, but the cost for having an attorney present the case in immigration court can be as much as \$10,000. With funding through Universal Representation, asylum seekers have been able to sign up with ECO and get on the list to be provided an immigration attorney to present their case.

The 2025 Fair Shot Coalition's Immigrant Justice Package offers funding to continue Universal Representation so that immigrants can be represented in immigration court. However, asylum seekers and other immigrants need help before they have

their case heard in immigration court. There are important immigration documents that need to be filed with the Department of Homeland Security, such as work permits, asylum applications and DACA renewals. SB 149 will provide additional funding so that these pre-court immigration legal services can be available at no cost to the client. Also, there will be case management services, which are crucial to ensure that the client has access to the other services they need and that they meet all the deadlines and requirements in navigating the complex immigration system.

Recent developments in the Administration's immigration policies make the passage of SB 149 even more urgent. Literally hundreds of thousands of immigrants who have a legal status now are being stripped of that protection and the Administration is pushing for more aggressive prosecution in the street and in the courts.

Oregon's New Neighbors Coordinated Access Act is an opportunity for Oregon to choose to invest in welcoming new neighbors and protecting neighbors who have been contributing greatly to our State. In a time of great uncertainty for this community, your support for SB 149 will mean that immigrants feel safer and more welcome in Oregon.

By funding the 2025 Immigrant Justice Package, we can build a stronger, more resilient state for all Oregonians.

Sincerely,
Kenneth Crouse
Lebanon, OR