

Submitter: Frank Garcia
On Behalf Of: Immigration Counseling Service
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1594

Testimony of Frank Garcia
Executive Director, Immigration Counseling Service
In Support of SB 1594

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, members of the Committee,
My name is Frank Garcia, and I am the Executive Director of Immigration Counseling Service (ICS). Founded in 1978, ICS is Oregon's oldest and only independent full service nonprofit immigration law firm. For 45 years, our community-based non-profit organization has provided low-income immigrants and refugees in Oregon with legal services and connected them to wrap around support. Our programs were born out of the pain and needs of Oregon's immigrant, migrant, refugee, and asylee communities.

I am here today in support of SB 1594. Directing the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement to develop and maintain uniform administrative policies that address critical issues concerning the safety and privacy of immigrants in Oregon is an important first step in the state agency coordination that we have advocated for several years.

ICS has long advocated for more coordination of information that serves the needs of our immigrant communities. In 2020, ICS published the Oregon Immigration Legal Needs Report—funded by the Oregon Immigrant and Refugee Funders Collaborative. While the study is over five (5) years old, many of the recommendations are still not only relevant, but vital to the health of our immigrant communities. I have included a copy of our report with my testimony, but I'll point out two recommendations related to gathering information that is essential when making decisions that affect our immigrant communities.

- Currently, there is no centralized data collection or data sharing about Oregon immigrants. There is a lot data collected by social services and legal services providers, funders, and state agencies such as health, education, court language access, migrant and seasonal farm labor, farm labor contractors and agricultural housing, employment, workers compensation, and more. However, all of this data is siloed, often hard to find, and sometimes internally inconsistent. Given the numbers of immigrants in Oregon and their profound contributions to the state's economy and culture, it is imperative that policy makers have access to accurate, up-to-date, and actionable data.

- A robust study should be commissioned that addresses the cultural, social, economic, educational and linguistic demographics of Oregon's immigrants, as well as their legal and social needs. This study should be conducted by highly trained sociologists who examine existing data sets, identify gaps in data sets, and conduct culturally and linguistically appropriate surveys using trusted community partners.

We realize that in these tight budget times, funding for studies do not have the same urgency as direct service. However, in the long run, centralized information and data are critical to making good policy choices.

SB 1594 is a good first step. I urge your support.

Thank you.

Frank Garcia

Executive Director, Immigration Counseling Service (ICS)