
Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement

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Date: February 23, 2026

To: Members of the House Committee on Education

From: Jessica Ventura, Director Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement

My name is Jessica Ventura, Director of the Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement (OIRA) within the Oregon Department of Human Services. OIRA is not taking a position on SB 1538A. Our involvement in this bill is limited to the consultation role described in the text. We write to you to share what families and districts have raised with us and to provide a neutral overview of the bill as written.

Oregon is home to more than 400,000 immigrants and more than 67,000 refugees who have resettled here since 1975. Immigrants make up 13 percent of Oregon's labor force. These communities are at the center of our work.

The Legislature created OIRA in 2021 to ensure immigrant and refugee communities were not an afterthought in policy development or implementation. Our office works to make sure state systems respond in a consistent, lawful, and clear way when federal activity affects families. We do not regulate schools or law enforcement, and we do not provide direct services. Our role is statewide coordination and implementation support across agencies.

Since July when I started as Director for the office, my team and I visited more than forty community organizations and traveled more than two thousand miles across Oregon. In those conversations, families shared recurring questions about schools during periods of immigration enforcement activity.

Parents asked whether schools are required to share information with immigration authorities. Families asked what happens if federal agents appear at or near a school. Parents said they were unsure who within a district verifies warrants or communicates with



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federal agents. Some families shared that they kept children home during times of heightened enforcement because they did not understand district procedures. Newly arrived families asked for clearer information about privacy protections and how enrollment information is handled.

District leaders also raised questions with our office. During recent meetings, including with MESD, districts said they rely on general guidance under the Sanctuary Promise Act but do not have school-specific procedures to follow. Administrators shared that front office staff often feel uncertain about how to verify a warrant, what information may be shared under law, or how to communicate with families in a way that supports attendance. Districts said that clearer, statewide procedures would help staff respond consistently.

These are the themes that families and districts shared with us. They are not concerns about school quality or intent.

What We Heard During Strategic Planning

During OIRA's statewide strategic planning process, partners described similar questions. Families asked for clearer information about how schools respond when immigration enforcement activity occurs. Parents shared that uncertainty about school procedures adds to fear during federal activity. Community organizations asked for more consistency, so families know what to expect from public institutions.

How This Relates to SB 1538

In SB 1538, OIRA is named as a consultation partner to the Attorney General. Our role in this bill is advisory. We may provide context about what families and organizations have shared with us and reflect how state systems interact during immigration-related activity. We do not write the model policies. We do not direct districts or interpret legal requirements for K-12 settings. The Attorney General leads the development of model policies, and school districts and education service districts are responsible for providing the applicable model policies to their employees.

Oregon already has statewide guidance under the Sanctuary Promise Act, and districts use that guidance today. What families and districts have raised with us is the desire for school-specific procedures that reflect the operational realities of K-12 settings. Our understanding is that SB

1538 directs the Attorney General to incorporate that school-specific layer into the work already in place.

Closing

Thank you for the opportunity to share what families and districts have described to us and to outline my understanding of the bill text. OIRA is not taking a position on SB 1538, and our role within the bill is consultative only.

Respectfully,

Jessica Ventura
Director, Office of Immigrant and Refugee Advancement
Oregon Department of Human Services

