



## Testimony in Support of HB 3265

**Cameron Coval, Executive Director, Pueblo Unido PDX**

**March 25, 2021**

Chair Bynum, Vice-Chairs Noble and Power, and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I am the executive director of Pueblo Unido PDX, a nonprofit in Portland, Oregon that provides legal service navigation, client advocacy, and financial support to immigrants facing detention and deportation in the Pacific Northwest. We connect people to legal aid and help gather evidence to give them the best possible chance to win their cases against removal and remain in their communities with their families. **Pueblo Unido PDX strongly supports HB 3265 to protect Oregonian families and preserve local resources.**

We're all Oregonians, no matter where we were born or how we came here. Immigrant Oregonians are part of our families, communities, workplaces and places of worship, and they should be safe from unfair harassment and profiling just like any other Oregonian.

The Sanctuary Promise Act strengthens our current sanctuary law by accomplishing the following:

- **Disentanglement:** Builds trust in Oregon communities by clearly prohibiting local law enforcement and governments from working with and communicating with federal agents for the purpose of immigration enforcement.
- **Private right of action:** Allows community members to seek accountability when the law is violated.
- **Prohibition of detention contracts:** Prohibits state and local correctional facilities from contracting with the federal government for immigration detention.
- **Prohibition of private detention centers:** Prohibits private entities like for-profit corporations from operating private prisons for immigrant detention.
- **Courthouses:** Protects Oregon's justice system by enshrining into law the current state court rule that prohibits warrantless civil arrests in and around courthouses.

Oregon's sanctuary law is the nation's oldest and has formed part of our state identity for 30 years. Despite our long-standing sanctuary law, however, state and local government agencies across Oregon still assist Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents in targeting Oregonians and swiftly moving them through the jail-and-prison-to-deportation pipeline. This destroys trust in communities, tears apart Oregon families, and makes all of us less safe.

Our organization, and I personally, have worked with several Oregonians unjustly impacted by collaboration between immigration officials, law enforcement agencies, and the Department of Corrections. Some of these individuals were arrested at courthouses while trying to comply with a judge's orders. Others were profiled and arrested by local police, and held in jail for excessive periods in order to allow ICE to show up and detain them. Still others were ill-advised by their public defender, sentenced to a lengthy stay in prison, and upon finally completing their sentence, were released into the arms of ICE and shipped to a detention facility.

Pueblo Unido has been, and continues to be, actively involved in trying to stop the deportations of these individuals, get them released from detention, and reunite them with their loved ones. But it has been made painfully clear that there is no true sanctuary for immigrants while local police and resources are being used to support federal immigration enforcement.

The past four years have shown us just how broken the federal immigration system is. We have seen children held in border camps, families separated, and federal immigration agents making terrifying arrests in our courthouses and in our communities.

Reports have also demonstrated time and time again just how horrid and inhumane America's immigrant detention facilities are. We know that people in detention are vulnerable and subject to abuse by guards, or other people in detention, and often have no options for redress because their complaints are ignored, or worse, result in retaliation by guards and ICE agents. Arbitrary punishment is commonplace in detention, including being denied phone access, placed in isolation, or even in the *hielera* ("ice box"), excessively cold detention rooms. Outbreak after outbreak has shown that detention centers are breeding grounds for infectious diseases like measles, mumps, pneumonia, and of course, COVID-19.

We should not be surprised, then, that the death toll in ICE custody in 2020 was [the highest it's been in 15 years](#). But this peak in preventable deaths was due not only to COVID-19, but also to [widespread failures in medical care](#) in detention centers. Indeed, independent and congressional investigations of medical care provided to individuals in ICE custody have repeatedly shown substandard care and violations of medical standards, including performing [horrific procedures without informed consent](#). Such atrocities occur frequently in America's detention centers, and private contractors like Geo Group profit from this suffering.

As if these violations of basic human rights were not enough, people in detention are all too often denied due process in proceedings that can equate to a matter of family reunification or permanent separation, or even of life or death. Although the government exercises the right to detain immigrants for lengthy periods of time for civil violations, it does not extend the right of appointed counsel to those who cannot afford to hire their own legal representative. Legal representation is the single most predictive factor in whether an individual will pursue relief, get released from detention, and prevail against deportation, but of course, most people do not have \$10,000 to pay an attorney, or \$15,000 to

post a bond. In effect, many of our relatives, friends, and neighbors simply cannot afford the price of freedom.

Here in Oregon, we can't fix the broken federal immigration system on our own, but we can take crucial steps to contribute to thriving communities where people are treated with dignity. We can disrupt the jail-to-prison-to-deportation pipeline by strengthening the law that protects Oregonians from racial profiling. We can increase trust and safety in communities by disentangling state and local law enforcement agencies from immigration enforcement. We can protect our justice system by prohibiting warrantless civil arrests at courthouses. And we can protect human rights, keep families together, and safeguard due process protections by outlawing immigrant detention in all its forms.

The Sanctuary Promise Act would help us realize each of these goals, and constitute an important step towards a more safe and welcoming environment for all Oregonians. **We urge you to vote YES on HB 3265.**