

HB 3230
March 30, 2021

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

My name is Frank Garcia, and I am the Executive Director of Immigration Counseling Service. I speak today on behalf of a coalition of organizations that provide immigration legal services, community outreach and education and wrap-around services to Oregonians across the state.

Since the 1970s, our community-based organizations have provided low-income immigrants and refugees in Oregon with wrap-around support and legal services. Our programs were born out of the pain and needs of Oregon's immigrant, migrant, refugee and asylee communities. Our leadership and boards are led by people who have experienced generational disenfranchisement and marginalization, by immigrant and refugee community members, and by Oregonians who have a direct stake in these conversations. Our staff are members of and reflective of the diverse communities we serve.

Over the decades, our collaborative has collectively represented over 10,000 low-income clients per year – and yet the community's demand for these services remains urgent and is growing at an alarming rate. We must pass this legislation to expand the legal safety net to serve over 20,000 Oregonians through our organizations, other existing organizations and emerging legal providers.

In Oregon today, we are seeing immigrant families struggling to pay bills while living in the shadows. We are seeing multigenerational households and entire community networks being impoverished by a system demanding an individual in removal proceedings scrape together up to \$20,000 for their legal defense. We are seeing women living in constant fear of ICE apprehension, and the terror of being separated from their children.

However, this is not a future that has to persist. This is not the Oregon we believe in. With your support for HB 3230, we can create an Oregon where young undocumented people have access to the labor market through DACA and work permits, where they are given the opportunity to support their families with dignity and integrity. We can create an Oregon where families and communities can access free legal representation, where they do not have to go bankrupt while trying to spare their loved ones from the horrors of ICE detention. We can create an Oregon where immigrant and refugee families are protected and remain united, where they are afforded full membership in our communities.

The *Oregon Immigration Legal Needs Report* (attached), prepared in 2020 by LexTerra Strategies and funded by the Oregon Immigrant and Refugee Funders Collaborative through support of Immigration Counseling Service, calls out the following realities lived by our immigrant communities:

- Cost remains the most significant barrier to accessing legal services
- Legal status dramatically reduces the risk of exploitation and fear
- Legal status and naturalization bring financial stability and prosperity

- Naturalized citizens enjoy better access to health care coverage
- Immigrants, especially those without legal status or without the means to access the legal services to gain a pathway to legalization, suffer a disproportionate rate of harm from ancillary legal and social needs
- Immigrants already make significant contributions to Oregon's economy; Providing a pathway to legalization will dramatically increase those contributions

We are supportive of an amended version of HB 3230 that is currently being finalized and that draws from lessons learned from the current Equity Corps pilot program. We are grateful for the tireless work of the group of legislators working to bring together the best elements of two distinct proposals.

We applaud the fact that the amended language leverages the existing Legal Services Program at the Oregon State Bar, which has proven it is simultaneously accountable to clients - by demanding legal excellence and equal access across the state - and to community needs - through robust, multi-layered community needs assessments.

Based on 100 years of collective experience and several decades of collaboration, **clients served by OSB-funded organizations should be able to directly access a provider of their choosing, stay with that chosen attorney during the length of their case, and should not endure multiple case screenings or passed between multiple providers.** This bill must be trauma-informed, client-centered and as cost-effective as possible, given the massive unmet need for immigration legal services in our state.

To meet the extreme need for immigration legal services that we witness daily in our work with the community, HB 3230 should maximize the number of Oregonians receiving these direct legal services. **Therefore, we believe it is important to have the bill provide at least equal funding** between the crucial immigration legal services offered through the Oregon State Bar, and the other elements of the bill, in order to best protect families and help all Oregonians thrive.

We also believe the bill should invest in existing immigration legal services funds that today efficiently pay for federal immigration application fees and other case costs.

And we believe HB 3230 must ensure that state funding is focused on Oregon households that earn less than or equal to 200% of the federal poverty line. With so many vulnerable Oregonians demanding these services, we must prioritize limited funding for those most in need.

We are eager to work together to see this crucial bill pass this session.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Frank Garcia
Executive Director, Immigration Counseling Service