



Testimony in Support of SB 1543 Universal Representation

Senate Committee on Judiciary and Ballot 110 Implementation

February 3, 2022

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher and members of the committee:

We are writing on behalf of Centro Latino Americano, Downtown Languages, and Huerto de la Familia. We are three nonprofits in Lane County, Oregon, and we are in the final stage of merging together to create a brand new, bigger, immigrant and Latino-serving nonprofit. As the Co-Executive Directors and Leadership and Policy Coordinator of this brand-new organization, we are asking you to support SB 1543 Universal Representation. This bill is vital to our work empowering Latinx and immigrant community members to thrive in a safe community, free from persecution and fear.

SB 1543 Universal Representation would ensure legal representation for undocumented Oregonians at risk of unjust deportation. Many Oregon immigrants facing deportation have valid legal claims to remain in the country, but the overwhelming majority have no legal representation in the immigration courts. Immigration law is a civil matter. Unlike the criminal justice system, there is no constitutional right to legal representation, and access to affordable immigration legal services in Oregon is limited.

All Oregonians should be treated fairly and with dignity under the law, but this is not the case for many immigrant and refugee community members. Communities of color face heightened dangers due to racial profiling. This creates a climate of fear and anxiety in our community, and increases the risk for detention and deportation. Once someone is swept up in the deportation process, representation by a lawyer becomes a decisive factor in determining the outcome. Without representation, due process violations accumulate quickly, sinking otherwise winnable defenses against deportation.¹ Alone, an immigrant is five-and-a-half times more likely to lose their case and to be ordered deported from the United States. Many go back to situations where their lives are in danger.²

SB 1543 Universal Representation is a crucial step toward ensuring due process for everyone in Oregon and bringing greater integrity to the immigration court system. It expands on a proven pilot program that helped more than 1,300 immigrant

¹ https://nipnlg.org/PDFs/practitioners/practice_advisories/pr/2021_21Dec_Rooted-in-Racism-Report.pdf

² <https://innovationlawlab.org/media/Defending-Everyone-1.pdf>



Oregonians fight unlawful deportation, pursue asylum, and secure work authorization.³ The pilot program included some members of our own community, and expansion would serve many more local families.

This bill would make available funds to be administered by the Oregon State Bar. Immigration lawyers would be placed across the state, and court costs such as filing fees and interpretation would also be covered. An existing statewide coalition of organizations - with deep roots and relationships within their respective communities - would implement and oversee the program. As established partners within this coalition, we are confident this coalition will become an effective backbone for universal legal defense services.

Deportations tear apart the fabric of our community leaving a wake of economic hardship and profound trauma. Our new organization cares deeply about shifting toward a more equitable immigration system. In order to achieve this vision, we must protect the rights of all Oregonians. Due process is a fundamental right, but without legal representation, it is little more than an ideal. Please join us in making this ideal a reality by supporting SB 1543 Universal Representation.

Thank you,

Marissa Elena Zarate, Co-Executive Director and Member of the Oregon State Bar

David Sáez, Co-Executive Director

Katharine V. Gallagher, Leadership & Policy Coordinator

The Latinx & Immigrant Family Wellness Hub is a collaborative project of [Centro Latino Americano](#), [Downtown Languages](#) & [Huerto de La Familia](#)

³ [Universal Representation One Pager](#)