



February 6, 2022

Re: Support for SB 1543

Chair Prozanski, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of SB 1543, which would provide immigrant Oregonians with legal support during deportation proceedings. My name is Jenny Lee, and I am the Deputy Director at the Coalition of Communities of Color, an alliance of culturally specific community-based organizations dedicated to collective action for racial justice.

No matter where we come from, we all deserve dignity, respect, and due process under the law. Thousands of immigrants and refugees across the state call Oregon home. However, far too many of our friends, family, and neighbors are at risk of losing their place in our communities simply because they cannot afford an attorney. SB 1543 would help address a major injustice in the U.S. immigration legal system: the lack of access to legal services and resulting risk of deportation for people who have a lawful right to be in the country.

Deportation uproots impacted individuals by taking them from their homes, breaks families apart, and causes lasting harm and trauma, including to children whose family members are in proceedings. It profoundly disrupts the fabric of our communities. Immigrant and refugee Oregonians, especially those who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, continue to face targeted immigration enforcement that includes racial profiling, detention, family separation, and potential removal to countries where they have fled violence and persecution.

Legal representation helps those with a lawful right to remain in the U.S. stay in the country. Someone with an attorney is 5.5 times more likely to remain than if they had no representation, making a lawyer the single most outcome-determinative factor in removal proceedings. But affording legal fees is far out of reach for many people facing deportation. This bill helps safeguard due process by allowing immigrant Oregonians to access the rights afforded to them under existing law.

This program provides community members with support in navigating a range of services and identifying what will best meet their individual needs. The system would use the successful model of the Oregon Worker Relief Fund, where trusted community-based organizations help connect immigrants with accessible, culturally responsive, and community-focused legal services. Ultimately, this program would help more families stay together, and more Oregon residents to remain in their homes and communities.

We also recognize that we will need to increase support for Oregon's immigrants with additional affirmative legal services such as naturalization. We look forward to further expansion of legal services for immigrant Oregonians and the thoughtful implementation of this program, and we

appreciate the flexibility in this bill to enable the continued refinement of our approach to legal services for immigrants and refugees.

On behalf of the Coalition of Communities of Color, I urge you to pass SB 1543 to keep Oregon a welcoming, inclusive community that respects the rights and dignity of all who make this state our home.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jenny Lee', written in a cursive style.

Jenny Lee
Deputy Director
Coalition of Communities of Color