

SUBJECT: Yes on SB 1543

Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee.

My name is KellyAnn Cameron and I live in Portland.

I am writing in support of SB1543, Universal Legal Representation, which would provide immigrant Oregonians with legal support during deportation proceedings. Despite a new president and administration, Oregon's immigrants are still very vulnerable to deportation which is why we need accessible, prompt, culturally responsive, and community focused legal services.

Many people in removal proceedings have valid legal claims to remain in the country and continue to contribute to Oregon's communities, but no way to articulate these claims without the assistance of counsel. Universal representation safeguards due process by allowing immigrant Oregonians to access the rights afforded to them under existing law. Representation by an attorney is the single most determinative factor in the outcome of a deportation proceeding. Representation by an attorney improves someone's chances of staying with their family by 457 percent.

In my current job, I work as a domestic violence advocate primarily with immigrant and refugee survivors. I see, time and again, how critical free legal support is for the participants in our program, and the system repeatedly fails to meet legal needs of immigrant survivors. Almost all of the participants in my program are low-income and can't access community financial resources due to domestic violence. The financial barrier is often compounded for survivors with language and cultural barriers to easy access to US systems and processes. For speakers of less commonly spoken languages in Oregon, and illiterate survivors, language access and support navigating resources is extremely limited. Because of this, few, if any, of the immigrant survivors in our program can identify, access, and afford a private immigration attorney; or for that matter locate and join the waitlist for a free one without navigation assistance. Many are facing complicated legal battles in order to obtain status here in the United States, often directly related to their experiences of abuse. It is not uncommon for abusers to force a survivor to miss appointments in order to increase the precarity of their immigration situation and thus to further cement control. For this reason, our program offers immigration assistance. However, once people leave our program, and for those who are unable to access it, it is challenging to obtain sufficient legal support because the free or low-cost legal service programs are overwhelmed and have lengthy waitlists. Even those who are in our program face a waitlist to be accepted to DV services and an additional waitlist for legal support. Many, many more survivors are unable to access these immigration-specific DV services due to being based outside of the Portland Metro area, not being able to wait on the waitlist, and/or not knowing about this program, leading to even further decreased access to legal services.

A survivor fleeing abuse may need the reassurance of legal support to allow them to safely exit that dynamic without fear of abusers' threats of deportation. These threats for undocumented,

asylum and U/T-visa applicants, and even green card holders, are commonly cited as reasons that survivors I work with are afraid to leave abusive situations. Furthermore, people in high lethality cases may not have the time to wait months on a waitlist. Having free, accessible, and culturally-responsive immigration legal representation available for all of Oregon's many immigrant communities and languages would be a game-changer, and very possibly life-saver, for many immigrant DV survivors throughout the state and would help them on the path to (re)building stability for themselves and their children here in Oregon.

In addition the Equity Core of Oregon (ECO) program has assisted a number of the people I support. ECO has been proven to work, but again, is lacking in sufficient capacity to meet the needs of everyone in our program and beyond. I know that an expansion and improvement of ECO would greatly benefit many people.

We must protect the rights of everyone who calls Oregon home and support their ability to thrive. By doing so, we can continue being a place that values families and communities.

Thank you.

KellyAnn Cameron