

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

My name is Christopher Gonzalez, I live in Portland, and I am a volunteer with the Immigrant Mutual Aid Coalition (IMAC).

I am writing in support of SB 1543 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, 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 have no way to articulate these claims without the assistance of counsel. This bill 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 outcome determinative factor in deportation proceedings. Representation by an attorney improves someone's chances of staying with their family by 457 percent.

SB 1543 further expands the successful Equity Corps pilot program funded by Multnomah County, the City of Portland, and the State of Oregon to create statewide infrastructure for immigration legal defense.

Many immigrants come to IMAC to help make ends meet, picking up food and household supplies. They also get connected with outreach programs and get access to vaccines where it may otherwise be difficult. They have established lives and often cannot afford legal services that will give them a significantly greater chance at staying part of the community here. Many folks travel together or deliver supplies for each other, so accessible services are incredibly important.

Legal representation has been shown to decrease chances of deportation by 5.5 times. That means immigrants who are part of their community, perform essential jobs, and provide for our society can avoid being ripped from their lives and have their stability put in jeopardy. This kind of program has been implemented successfully before, as in the Oregon Worker Relief Fund model. We can allow communities of color to access organizations they know they can trust to help because it is built with a deep connection to them. It is about building a working system.

Even Oregonians protected by DACA and TPS have vulnerable to immigration enforcement that disproportionately target people of color. Children whose lives should not be affected by these inequitable laws are put in great danger of poverty and poor family health. One in ten Oregon children live with a family member without legal status, meaning solutions can work on a very impactful scale.

To close, I fully support SB 1543. A Democratic president and administration has not slowed the rate of deportations and disruption to communities. Those with valid legal claims to remain in the country must have due process and be able to assert their claims.

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.

Chris Gonzalez