



January 21, 2022

SUBJECT: Yes on Universal Representation

To whom it may concern:

I am the executive director of Pueblo Unido PDX, a non-profit organization that connects communities with vulnerable immigration status to legal, social, and Indigenous language interpretation services. I am writing to urge you to support Universal Legal Representation, which would provide immigrant Oregonians with legal support during deportation proceedings.

Despite a new president and administration, our friends, neighbors, and family with vulnerable immigration status remain at risk of deportation. Oregonians who are immigrants and refugees, especially those who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, face unjust immigration enforcement that includes racial profiling, detention, family separation, and potential removal to countries where they have fled violence and persecution.

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 and protections afforded to them under existing law.

Representation by an attorney is the single most determinative factor in deportation proceedings. Representation by an attorney improves someone's chances of staying with their family by 457 percent.

Universal Legal Representation expands the successful Equity Corps of Oregon (ECO) pilot program funded by Multnomah County, the City of Portland, and the State of Oregon to create statewide infrastructure for immigration legal defense.

Here are some key facts on Universal Legal Representation:

- The program would create a statewide call center that would provide direct contacts and streamline access for those seeking help.
- Impacted communities would be able to choose their provider.
- Community based organizations (CBOs) that already have deep connections to the community would oversee the program's policy and fiscal decisions and have an active role in coordinating.
- The statewide representation team would embed lawyers, through fellowships, at CBOs to ensure community members could turn to the organizations they already know and trust in times of need.



If implemented, Universal Representation would have an enormous positive impact on the lives of the community members that our organization serves every day. Pueblo Unido PDX is the statewide navigating organization for the ECO program, which means that our navigation team enrolls the majority of Oregonians served by ECO. Despite its important achievements, our organization witnesses daily the fact that the current iteration of the ECO program alone is not sufficient to meet the level of need for free, accessible immigration legal services across the state. Oregonians who are currently detained, for example, and those who are contesting a removal order, are not eligible for the ECO program. Moreover, these individuals are rarely able to obtain free or even reduced-cost legal services from nonprofit immigration legal service providers operating outside of the ECO program. Our organization has sought to address this gap by referring these individuals to private attorneys, and using donations to help cover their legal fees. However, Pueblo Unido can often only afford to pay for a private attorney's up-front retainer fee (typically \$2500-\$5000 per case), which means immigrant Oregonians must still pay an additional \$5000 or more to secure private legal representation. Universal Legal Representation would constitute a significant step towards addressing the remaining gap in immigration legal services, and ensuring access to counsel and due process for immigrant Oregonians.

In practice, Universal Legal Representation would mean the difference between family separation and unification; between marginalization and inclusion; and, for survivors of torture, political persecution, or discrimination due to their gender, sexuality, or identity, it would mean the difference between safety in the United States and a threat to their lives elsewhere. 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 healthy families, resilient communities, and human dignity.

Thank you for your attention to and consideration of this letter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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