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

Today I write in support of SB 1543, a bill that will provide immigrant Oregonians with the help they need to navigate the byzantine immigration system.

In Multnomah County, we have recognized for several years that all of our communities benefit by investing in universal legal navigation and representation services. In 2017, as immigrants and refugees around the country were facing an assault by the Trump Administration, we collaborated with our community based service providers and the City of Portland to establish a universal legal representation and navigation program. Over the five years that program has operated, hundreds of families in Multnomah County have been able to access the critical services needed to navigate the legal immigration system.

By expanding this program statewide, Oregon is making a groundbreaking investment in one of our most important resources: the immigrant communities who sustain our economy and invigorate our nation by becoming new Americans. Investing in organizations that are working directly with and alongside these communities will better serve individuals and families and ensure the support they receive is culturally-informed and linguistically-appropriate.

Our national immigration system is broken. While I am hopeful that the Biden administration will be able to work with Congress to overhaul this confusing and inefficient system, in the meantime we must do everything in our power to support the Oregonians who are struggling to navigate it. SB 1543 will be a significant help.

Sincerely,

Jessica Vega Pederson
Multnomah County Commissioner