

Submitter: Kelsey Baker

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary and Ballot Measure 110
Implementation

Measure: SB1543

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

My name is Kelsey Baker and I live in Portland.

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.

Oregon is home to thousands of immigrants and refugees who live in urban and rural areas statewide, and are critical to the state's cultural and economic vitality. Immigrant Oregonians work in key Oregon industries, are essential workers, and own small businesses that contribute to the vibrancy of our communities. I have many friends and neighbors in my community who are immigrants, and they deserve to have access to culturally-responsive, free, accessible legal services.

We know that the right legal representation can make a big difference in a person's case! A community member without legal representation is 5.5 times more likely to be deported regardless of the merit of their case. We've already seen this same kind of community focused system in action. By taking the lessons learned from the Oregon Worker Relief Fund model, we can build a similar system that allows our communities of color to connect with the organizations they already know and trust to help them during this difficult time.

All Oregonians should be treated with dignity and respect regardless of where they were born. But Oregonians who are immigrants and refugees, especially immigrant Oregonians who are Black, Indigenous, or people of color, have faced increased immigration enforcement that includes racial profiling, detention, family separation, and potential removal to countries where they have fled violence and persecution.

Even Oregonians protected by DACA and TPS are still vulnerable to these inequitable processes. This has disrupted our local communities and put Oregon's children at increased risk of poverty. According to the Oregon Center for Public Policy, one in every 10 Oregon children live with a family member without legal status. 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.

Kelsey Baker