



February 9, 2021

Chair Prozansk, Vice Chair Thatcher, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

As advocates for reproductive justice, Pro-Choice Oregon understands the importance of ensuring that all Oregonians—regardless of their circumstances—have the tools they need to make their own personal health care decisions.

Pro-Choice Oregon strongly supports SB 1543 which would ensure Oregon’s immigrants have access to legal representation during deportation proceedings. SB 1543 would create accessible, culturally-responsive, and community-centered legal services.

Pro-Choice Oregon is dedicated to ensuring every person can access their fundamental rights to bodily autonomy, and can make their own personal decisions regarding their reproductive lives and futures, including preventing unintended pregnancy, raising healthy families, and choosing legal abortion. Over the last five years, we have prioritized support for policies to center those categorically excluded from public programs due to immigration status. Policies like Healthy Kids, so no child is excluded from the Oregon Health Plan, and the Reproductive Health Equity Act, so all people who can become pregnant are able to access the full spectrum of reproductive health care services. In 2019, we supported Drivers Licenses For All, to recognize that transportation plays an important role in the ability to raise and support a healthy family.

Reproductive justice is inherently connected to immigration justice. Often those who are going through a removal proceeding have valid legal claims to remain in the country and continue to contribute to Oregon’s communities. Unfortunately, many are unable 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 outcome determinative factor in deportation proceedings. **Representation by an attorney improves someone’s chances of staying with their family by 457 percent¹.**

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.

¹ Ingrid V. Eagly & Steven Shafer, *A National Study of Access to Counsel in Immigration Court*, 164 U. Pa. L. Rev. 1 (2015), https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/penn_law_review/vol164/iss1/2



By passing SB 1543, Oregon can be a national leader in ensuring immigrants in our state know they are supported and will receive help during a difficult and traumatic process. Universal Legal Representation will:

- Expand the Equity Corps pilot program funded by Multnomah County, City of Portland, and state to create a statewide program for immigration legal defense.
- Ensure immigrant community members can turn to trusted organizations for legal support, by establishing a statewide representation team of attorneys available at CBOs through a network of community-based fellowships.
- Prepare Oregon for any major changes in national immigration policy by creating community-led pathways to citizenship.
- Create a statewide call center that would provide direct contacts and streamline access for those seeking help.
- Ensure impacted communities would be able to choose their provider.
- Allow trusted community-based organizations to oversee the program's policy and fiscal decisions and have an active role in coordinating.

Oregon is home to thousands of immigrants and refugees from diverse backgrounds who live in both urban and rural settings across our state. Statewide, immigrant communities are critical to our 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.

A community member without legal representation is 5.5 times more likely to be deported regardless of the merit of their case². We can take lessons learned from the Oregon Worker Relief Fund model and build a system that allows our communities of color to connect with the organizations they already know and trust to help them during this difficult time.

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, and lasting harm and trauma. **According to the Oregon Center for Public Policy, one in every 10 Oregon children live with a family member without legal status³.** SB 1543 will increase family, food, and housing stability, improve healthcare outcomes, and facilitate access to education, thus minimizing the strain on local and state social services⁴.

² Innovation Law Lab, *Defending Everyone: How Innovative Universal Representation Invests in Our Collective Prosperity*, <https://innovationlawlab.org/media/Defending-Everyone-1.pdf>

³ Janet Bauer, *Tax Credit for Workers Leaves Out more than a Quarter-million Oregonians*, Oregon Center for Public Policy, March 24, 2021, <https://www.ocpp.org/2021/03/24/eitc-itin-exclusion-quarter-million-oregon/>

⁴ Innovation Law Lab, *Defending Everyone: How Innovative Universal Representation Invests in Our Collective Prosperity*, <https://innovationlawlab.org/media/Defending-Everyone-1.pdf>



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. **We urge your YES vote on SB 1543.**

Thank you,

Jeanine Morales
Deputy Director, Pro-Choice Oregon

