

TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary
FROM: Matt Newell-Ching, Senior Policy Manager
RE: Support for SB 627
DATE: January 26, 2023



Chair Prozanski, Vice-Chair Thatcher, and members of the committee,

Oregon Food Bank's mission is to end hunger and its root causes. We pursue this goal in two key ways: we foster community connections to help people access nutritious food today, and we advocate to change policies that drive hunger and poverty.

Oregonians who are immigrants make our communities stronger. Yet we know that, due to a host of institutional and systemic challenges, Oregonians who are immigrants and refugees face double the rate of food insecurity compared to people born in the United States.

We urge passage of SB 627 to continue the work of ensuring all Oregonians are treated fairly regardless of where we were born. Oregon Food Bank has been a strong supporter of the Universal Representation program, and we were thrilled that Oregon passed SB 1543 in 2022 to ensure all Oregonians have access to legal counsel to help keep families together.

SB 627 continues this important work by providing the necessary funding for these efforts. **This bill safeguards due process by allowing immigrant Oregonians to access the rights afforded to them under existing law.** Since the program's inception as a pilot program in 2018, it's helped over 2,700 Oregonians navigate complex legal situations. This includes 750+ Oregonians who faced violence or persecution who were empowered to request asylum, and 350+ Oregonians who applied for work authorization. This is critical because representation by an attorney improves someone's chances of staying with their family by over 400%.

Oregonians who are immigrants work in key industries, are essential workers, provide care for our communities, and own small businesses that contribute to the vibrancy of our state. But despite the many social, cultural and economic contributions of this community, immigration policy decisions often wrongfully target immigrant families and heighten a climate of fear. The cumulative impact of these policies has created a chilling effect that impacts families' sense of dignity. Many community members have reported not feeling safe accessing food assistance programs like SNAP, school meals, and even food pantries because of fear. No one should have to choose between eating and keeping your family together.

Fundamentally, we believe this bill is about fairness. **SB 627 is a critical step toward protecting the rights of everyone who calls Oregon home.**

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