



February 22, 2023

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chairs, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Britt Conroy, and I serve as Public Policy Director at Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. At EMO's SOAR Legal Immigration Services program, we serve more than 2000 Oregonians statewide annually with life-changing legal representation and support. EMO six total direct service programs serve hundreds of thousands of low-income Oregonians every year, and we are proud to partner with our 15 member denominations that represent over 675 congregations across the state.

EMO enthusiastically encourages you to pass HB 2957 out of this committee and send the bill to Ways & Means. The Support for Dreamers legislation introduced by Rep. Ruiz and others will strengthen our families and our communities.

We encourage this committee to fully fund this \$7m proposal, and to adopt an amendment that makes three changes to HB 2957:

(1) Ensure that community-based organizations that are U.S. Department of Justice-accredited immigration legal nonprofits are eligible to support Dreamers/DACAistas with the investments of HB 2957, as has been the intent of this bill

Oregon's DOJ-accredited organizations are proud of our community-based legal services program, staffed by members of the communities served and trusted by community members who seek out our expertise. This amendment explicitly states that "community-based organizations and DOJ-accredited providers of immigration legal services" are eligible for this funding, ensuring the original intent of this bill is honored during implementation.

(2) Leverage Dreamer/DACA renewals to offer consultations and services to close family members who may be legally eligible to apply for a secure immigration status

We believe that a program that supports not just Dreamers/DACAistas but also provides legal consultations and legal services to the family members of DACAistas would allow a single DACA renewal consultation to result in the stabilization of an entire household. We know that many family members of Dreamers/DACAistas are in fact legally eligible to obtain a legal immigration status, but simply do not know this is the case or do not have the financial resources to secure these protections. Ultimately, Oregon should do everything possible to increase access to life-changing legal support for every eligible Oregonian.

(3) Stand with would-be Dreamers/DACAistas who have been blocked from applying for DACA

We also believe that Oregon should stand with those who would otherwise be eligible to file for an Initial DACA, if it weren't for the ongoing legal challenge of that program. By offering legal consultations for these Oregonians, we could identify other possible pathways to legal status for these individuals, and prepare them for an initial DACA application, should that pathway again open.

Arriving here as children, Dreamers/DACAistas are us, our friends, neighbors, employees and community leaders. In a time of pandemic, Dreamers' talents and skills have kept businesses afloat and saved lives on health care front lines.

This biennium, thousands of Oregonians who have qualified for DACA will need to submit renewals for this protection and for a work permit, costing hundreds of dollars in legal and application filing fees. This bill would remove financial barriers to securing this life-changing protection.

Moreover, to reiterate, we know from years supporting Dreamers and their closest family members that many are eligible for other immigration protections. This means that the legal screening provided by experienced attorneys that is envisioned in this bill could identify existing pathways to legal status for many Oregonians and protect entire families.

EMO is grateful for the leadership of Rep. Ruiz and of this committee. We stand ready to partner with you in the weeks ahead to pass and fully fund this bill at \$7m.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Britt Conroy
Public Policy Director
Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO)

Proposed Amendment to Section 2 of HB 2957

(2) The Department of Human Services shall establish a program to distribute funds to community-based organizations and DOJ-accredited providers of immigration legal services to provide financial assistance to individuals who are recipients of DACA and those who would otherwise be eligible to apply for DACA for the first time were it not for a court-ordered pause of such initial applications. A community-based organization that receives funds under this section:

(a) May provide not more than ~~\$695~~ \$___ per individual.

(b) Shall ensure that an individual who receives financial assistance described in this subsection uses the funds for:

(A) The \$495 fee for renewal of DACA; and

(B) Up to \$200 in legal costs and fees associated with an application for DACA renewal, an initial DACA application or other immigration relief identified by the community-based organization;

(C) Up to \$___ for legal screenings for the parents, siblings or grandparents of an individual who is a recipient of DACA; and

(D) Up to \$___ for attorney fees or USCIS fees for the parents, siblings or grandparents of an individual who is a recipient of DACA.

(c) May not provide the financial assistance described in this subsection more than once to the same individual.

(d) May provide the financial assistance described in this subsection only to individuals who meet the eligibility criteria.