



DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
OFFICE OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

DATE: April 19, 2023

TO: Chair Kropf, Vice-Chairs Wallan and Andersen, and
Members of the House Committee on Judiciary

FROM: Kimberly McCullough, Legislative Director
Oregon Department of Justice

SUBJECT: SB 597 – U-Visa Certification

The Oregon Department of Justice (DOJ) urges your support of SB 597, which will support implementation of the federal U-Visa program in Oregon. The Attorney General's Labor Trafficking Task Force also supports this bill, as the need for this bill was discussed numerous times by the full task force and an immigrant crime victims' rights subcommittee convened by DOJ.¹

The U-Visa program was designed to increase public safety by strengthening the ability of law enforcement agencies to investigate and prosecute crimes, while ensuring that victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and trafficking are not deterred from seeking help from law enforcement by a fear of immigration sanctions.

Often, abusers use a victim's lack of immigration status as a threat, or tool of further abuse. Perpetrators threaten deportation and immigration sanctions as a means of keeping their victims within their control. Victims who lack status are afraid to seek help, or to cooperate with a law enforcement investigation, for fear of immigration consequences.

The U-Visa program was created to help facilitate a pathway to safety for victims, by providing that cooperation with law enforcement will protect against immigration sanctions and provide a pathway to lawful status. In providing this pathway for victims, the U-Visa program was also intended to help improve law enforcement's ability to investigate and prosecute serious crime.

In 2019, this legislature passed SB 962, which improved our state's support of crime victim immigrants seeking U-Visas in several ways. An important part of that bill was a requirement that agencies that certify U-Visas report information about their certifications to Oregon's Criminal

¹ Note that a suite of additional policy proposals supported by the Attorney General's Labor Trafficking Task Force will be introduced in the Senate shortly, as the main bill from the task force is still being drafted by Legislative Counsel.

Justice Commission (CJC). As a result, CJC collected data and reported out valuable information about how U-Visa certification is working in Oregon.² Information like this is crucial to ensuring our system is working and that we can make improvements if needed.

Unfortunately, the reporting mechanism ended in January of this year. SB 597 will revive the program and continue it until January 2, 2027.

Please join us and the Attorney General's Labor Trafficking Task Force by supporting SB 597.

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² You can view the most recent report at this link:

https://www.oregon.gov/cjc/CJC%20Document%20Library/U_Visa_Report_Dec2022.pdf