

02/05/2024

SUBJECT: Yes to HB 4085, Fund Pathways to Citizenship

Yes on HB 4085

Chair Reynolds, Vice-Chair Nguyen, Vice-Chair Scharf, Members of the Committee:

I am writing in support of House Bill 4085. In working with immigrants in Oregon as a volunteer I have observed how difficult it can be for people to obtain legal services. Sometimes the person does not know where to find an immigration attorney, especially one who offers pro bono services. Even if they have information about immigration attorneys, the cost of services may seem prohibitive.

One area where not having access to qualified immigration legal services can have serious consequences is in the filing of immigration forms. Some answers given on a form can have legal implications that the immigrant may not understand without the assistance of an attorney. Some forms have strict filing deadlines that can threaten the success of a case, if they are not met.

An example of a form that most immigrants will need to file is the I-765, Application for Employment Authorization. It is natural for a new arrival to want to begin working and earning an income as soon as possible, but working without authorization could jeopardize a person's case. The form consists of 27 pages of instructions, and would be difficult to complete without legal assistance.

Another example of a form that is critical for asylum seekers is the I-589, Application for Asylum. There is a deadline for filing this form within one year of arrival in the United States, and eligibility for work authorization is tied to this form. Failure to file by the deadline can prevent someone from earning asylum. I have been in the immigration courtroom when the judge noted that multiple immigrants had not met the deadline. His instructions were clear: "Return to court with a completed I-589 for your next hearing, or you will be placed in removal proceedings."

No immigrant should lose their case because they did not have the legal help needed to file the proper documents necessary to reach a successful outcome. For these and many more reasons I kindly ask that you pass HB 4085.

Thank you,

Ken Crouse