

Submitter: Lauren MacKenzie
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Judiciary
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB703

Chair Prozanski Vice-Chair Thatcher and members of the committee

My Name is Lauren MacKenzie and I am a voter from Portland.

I enthusiastically support SB 703/HB 2788, Pathways to Protection and Citizenship. SB 703 allocates money to the Department of Human Services to award grants to nonprofit legal service providers that cover the cost of clients legal services. This is a bill that will save and strengthen families, improve outcomes in ODHS programs, bolster our workforce, and strengthen the general fund by helping immigrants transition from state services like Healthier Oregon to OHP.

We need to protect the over 25,000 Oregonians who are eligible for legal immigration status, but for the high cost of legal services, are living in fear, out of the employment mainstream, and struggling to support their families. Immigrant and refugee communities make up more than 13% of our state's workforce, yet legal costs prevent many Oregonians from obtaining a more secure immigration status.

As a volunteer with Catholic Charities refugee services, I have seen firsthand how a legal path for migrants can enable them to become employed and rapidly contribute to our communities both financially and by enriching it with their cultures. It makes sense for our local communities and our state to aid as many of our hard-working residents as we legally can.

Thank you for your time and for standing with all Oregonians.

Sincerely,

Lauren MacKenzie