



Oregon Pediatric Society

A Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. Incorporated in Oregon

February 4, 2022

TO: The Honorable Senator Prozanski, Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

FROM: Paul G. Mitchell, MD

SUBJECT: Support for Senate Bill 1543, Universal Representation

My name is Paul Mitchell. I am a second-year pediatric resident physician at Doernbecher Children's Hospital and a member of the Oregon Pediatric Society board of directors. I write to express the strongest possible support for SB 1543, which would provide attorney services to immigrants facing deportation.

As a pediatrician, an enormous part of my job is building strong alliances with families in pursuit of a child's health. There are no more important partners in that pursuit than the parents who comfort, support, and advocate for their children. The absence of a parent is devastating for the development of any healthy child, let alone one with a chronic medical illness.

I think often about a quiet, shy two-year-old patient that I met several years ago. She had a rare immune system disease that left her susceptible to severe infections, and the child had been hospitalized for months being treated for one of these infections. When I met her, she spoke very little to providers and staff and would frequently cry intermittently throughout the night seemingly for no reason. It was noted by multiple doctors and nurses that she seemed to respond much more positively to male providers and physicians for reasons unknown at the time. I later found out that her father had been deported to Mexico shortly before she was diagnosed. Her meltdowns, her reluctance to speak, her preference for male providers, her tear-filled nights in a hospital bed were all because she desperately missed her daddy. She and her mother had been fighting and trying their best to cope with the complexity of a severe childhood illness while being forcibly separated from a crucial and loving part of their support system. This child's only connection with her father was through infrequent Facetime calls from her hospital bed. While seeing and talking to him on the screen, she frequently asked why he could not come visit her in the hospital. Neither I nor her mother had the words to explain to her why he could not. While already dealing with the unimaginable stress of severe medical illness, mother and daughter were forced to navigate the heartbreak of family separation.

Unfortunately, there are many others who have dealt with the same stressors as my young patient. There are currently 85,000 children in Oregon—about 1 in 10—living in a household



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with a person with undocumented status.¹ More than 5,300 of those children are part of a family that is currently battling a pending immigration case.² The outcomes of these cases will have heart-breaking effects on many children and families. A recent study in JAMA Pediatrics found that among Latinx adolescents, those who experienced family member detention or deportation had an increased likelihood of suicidal thoughts, alcohol use, aggression and rule-breaking.³ Aside from the obvious emotional and developmental toll that is taken by the removal or potential removal of a parent or loved one, it is estimated that an Oregon child whose parent is deported will also endure the cumulative loss of more than \$50,000 worth of financial support during their childhood.⁴ It's hard to quantify the compounding effects of these secondary financial stressors on the mental and physical development of a child. As a pediatrician, I have seen firsthand the acute and long-term mental health issues that financial insecurity through parental loss can have on a developing child or adolescent. As a child advocate, I speak firmly in support of any solution that helps families access the resources that keep them together.

Often, the best tool to prevent this traumatic experience for children is a strong and reliable defense in immigration court. Having representation from an attorney can increase the chances of preventing deportation in an immigration case by upwards of 400%.⁵ Senate Bill 1543 builds from a successful 2018 pilot program in Multnomah County that helped more than 1,300 Oregonians receive deportation legal representation that is their right under the law. By pursuing legislation and community programs that continue to fund and protect Universal Representation, we can help our friends and neighbors access their freedom of due process. We can support the mental and emotional health of children by keeping them united with their parents, their loved ones, their essential support systems.

I strongly urge you to vote yes on SB 1543 in pursuit of Universal Representation because all Oregon families belong together.

Respectfully,
Paul G. Mitchell, MD

¹ Janet Bauer, *Tax Credit for Workers Leaves Out more than a Quarter-million Oregonians*, Oregon Center for Public Policy, March 24, 2021, available at <https://www.ocpp.org/2021/03/24/eitc-itin-exclusion-quarter-million-oregon/>.

² OCPP analysis based on information about the composition of households with an immigration arrest shared with the author by email by Geoffrey Alan Boyce, Earlham College, November 23, 2021; and demographic data of the Migration Policy Institute regarding Oregon's undocumented population.

³ Roche KM, White RMB, Lambert SF, et al. Association of Family Member Detention or Deportation With Latino or Latina Adolescents' Later Risks of Suicidal Ideation, Alcohol Use, and Externalizing Problems. *JAMA Pediatr.* 2020;174(5):478–486. doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.0014

⁴ Janet Bauer, *Deportation Harms Oregon's Economy and Upends Family Security*, Oregon Center for Public Policy, December 15, 2021, available at <https://www.ocpp.org/2021/12/15/deportation-economy-harm/>

⁵ Ingrid V. Eagly & Steven Shafer A National Study of Access to Counsel in Immigration Court, 164 U. Pa. L. Rev. 1 (2015). Available at: https://scholarship.law.upenn.edu/penn_law_review/vol164/iss1/2