



State Senator Kayse Jama

Senate District 24 (D-East Portland)

Native land of Multnomah, Wasco, Cowlitz, Kathlamet, Clackamas, Bands of Chinook, Tualatin Kalapuya, Molalla, and many other tribes that made their homes along the Columbia and Willamette Rivers

PRESS RELEASE

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Oregon Senate Approves the Establishment of Universal Legal Representation in Immigration Proceedings

Senate Bill 1543 begins the process of guaranteeing legal counsel in immigration court proceedings.

SALEM, Oregon - Today the Oregon Senate approved Senate Bill 1543 on a vote of 17 to 8. Unlike in criminal court, undocumented immigrants facing deportation in civil immigration court are not guaranteed access to an attorney. This bill will bring immigration courts in parity with criminal court systems by granting each person, regardless of their ability to pay, access to competent legal representation. Access to an attorney results in fewer unlawful and unnecessary deportations which destabilizes families, disrupts local economies, reduces high school graduation rates, and increases overall reliance on child and social welfare programs.

“Defendants without an attorney face a complex and difficult legal system and may be subject to deportation that could have been avoided with proper legal counsel,” said Senator Kayse Jama (D-Portland), “This bill will begin the process of giving undocumented immigrants a fair process to argue their case and will reduce the number of unnecessary deportations.”

Senate Bill 1543 appropriates \$10.5 million to a newly created Universal Representation Fund to provide a statewide, integrated, universal legal navigation and representation system for immigration matters, and \$4.5 million for the Oregon State Bar’s Legal Services Program to provide legal services to individuals on immigration matters. It will create pathways to work authorization and economic participation for immigrants and refugees, allow for families to remain unified, and utilize partnerships with three Oregon law schools to incentive legal talent to stay within the state.

Senate Bill 1543 now goes to the House of Representatives for consideration.

About State Senator Kayse Jama: Senator Jama represents Senate District 24 (East Portland and North Clackamas) and serves as the chair of the Senate Committee On Housing and Development, and the Legislature’s Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Caucus. He was the first former refugee, Muslim, and Somali-American to serve in the Oregon State Senate. Before his appointment, Sen. Jama was a prominent community organizer and Executive Director of Unite Oregon.