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Sanctuary protection could be expanded to all public bodies

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A bill aimed at further protecting undocumented immigrants in Oregon had its first legislative hearing June 8. While its introduction comes late in the legislative session, its outlook is promising with backing from the governor and attorney general and with strong support from immigrants rights groups and the agriculture sector.

Under House Bill 3464, all public bodies in the state would be prohibited from sharing a person's personal information with federal agencies for the sole purpose of immigration enforcement.

This expansion of sanctuary protections would include courthouses, public health facilities, public shelters, public schools and other city- and county-run agencies.

The bill follows widespread reports of immigrants avoiding public places and government facilities out of fear that they will be detained and deported under the broader immigration enforcement

priorities of the Trump administration.

Multnomah County Circuit Court Presiding Judge Nan Waller said that while the Oregon Department of Justice is not taking a position on the bill, it is imperative that Oregon maintains the neutrality of its courts.

"Since the executive order on deportation was signed in late January, we've had consistent reports from lawyers, community organizations, victims advocates and public inquiries to the court that some members of our community are afraid to come to our courthouses," Waller told the House Committee on Rules.

"It would indeed be hard to measure how many people have not come to the court for a restraining order, how many people have not shown up to testify in a case, how many people have let their matter go and been defaulted," she said.

Personal information the bill would protect includes the time and location of appointments the person has with the public body, the person's address and phone number, workplace and work hours, school, names of friends and family and other information that is not a matter of public record.

While public testimony from some citizens opposed to the bill claimed

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otherwise, the bill indicates it would not prevent public bodies from complying with federal immigration authorities as federal laws require.

Additionally, the bill would not prevent immigration enforcement officials from entering public buildings, such as courthouses, or from obtaining publicly available information about court appearances.

Under Oregon's sanctuary status, law enforcement agencies have been prohibited for 30 years from using their resources to assist with the enforcement of federal immigration laws.

On Feb. 2, Gov. Kate Brown issued an executive order that added all state-run agencies to the list of public bodies

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Following reports that fearful immigrants are avoiding public spaces, a state bill would extend privacy measures to public schools, courthouses and other local agencies