



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 1294, RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

DATE: Wednesday, February 5, 2025 **TIME:** 9:00 a.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 430

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Kelcie K. Nagata or Christopher J.I. Leong, Deputy Attorneys
General

Chair Evslin and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General provides the following comments.

The purpose of this bill is to establish a working group within the Department of Agriculture to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State.

Pursuant to article V, section 6 of the Hawaii State Constitution, “[t]emporary commissions or agencies for special purposes may be established by law” This provision grants the Legislature, rather than the respective department, the authority to establish a commission or working group through statute. Accordingly, we recommend amending section 1(a) of the bill, on page 1, lines 1-4, as follows:

(a) [~~The department of agriculture shall establish~~] There is established within the department of agriculture for administrative purposes an agricultural workforce housing working group to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR



DEAN MINAKAMI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM
HAWAII HOUSING FINANCE AND DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
677 QUEEN STREET, SUITE 300
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813
FAX: (808) 587-0600

Statement of
DEAN MINAKAMI
Hawaii Housing Finance and Development Corporation
Before the

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

February 05, 2025 at 9:00 a.m.
State Capitol, Room 430

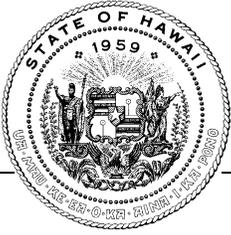
In consideration of
H.B. 1294
RELATING TO LAND USE.

Chair Evslin, Vice Chair Miyake, and members of the Committee.

HHFDC **supports** HB 1294, which requires the Department of Agriculture to establish an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State. It also requires reports to the Legislature and appropriates funds.

HHFDC is named as a member of the working group and agrees that collaboration would be a valuable way to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.



**STATE OF HAWAI'I
OFFICE OF PLANNING
& SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR

MARY ALICE EVANS
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Statement of
MARY ALICE EVANS, Director

before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
Wednesday, February 5, 2025
9:00 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 430

in consideration of
HB 1294
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING.

Chair Evslin, Vice Chair Miyake, and Members of the Committee:

The Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) offers **comments** on HB 1294, which would establish a multi-sector agricultural workforce housing working group to examine a range of tools and strategies to address the need for agricultural workforce housing in the State.

OPSD recognizes farmworker housing has been a long-standing concern for the agricultural sector in Hawai'i, and that overcoming the shortage of farmworker housing is vital to the long-term viability of agricultural producers. To this end, the Administration submitted HB 1013, which allows for farmer and farm worker cluster housing on lands designated as important agricultural lands that, if enacted, would provide a measure for addressing this issue.

OPSD stands ready to participate in the working group. Such a working group would be useful in determining how we, as a State, could collectively meet the industry's need for farmworker housing while protecting agricultural lands from non-agricultural residential uses.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR



WENDY GADY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
HUI HO'OUULU AINA MAHIAI

TESTIMONY OF WENDY L. GADY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

BEFORE THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
February 05, 2025
9:00 a.m.
Conference Room 430 & Videoconference

HOUSE BILL NO. 1294
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Chairperson Evslin, Vice Chair Miyake, and Members of the Committee:

The Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) **supports** House Bill 1294, which seeks to address the critical shortage of workforce housing for agricultural employees in Hawaii. This bill is an essential step toward supporting the agricultural sector, ensuring the stability of Hawaii's farming workforce, and promoting food security by enabling farmworkers to live closer to the lands they cultivate and care for. We also acknowledge and support the inclusion of ADC as a member of the proposed working group tasked with implementing this initiative, ensuring that workforce housing solutions align with the unique needs of farmers and agricultural employees across the state.

The Need for Workforce Housing in Agriculture

Hawaii's agricultural industry is a cornerstone of the state's economy, cultural heritage, and food security goals. However, the high cost of living,

limited affordable housing options, and lack of workforce housing near agricultural lands create significant barriers for farmworkers and their families.

Without adequate housing, many agricultural employees are forced to commute long distances or live in substandard conditions, contributing to worker shortages, increased operating costs for farmers, and decreased productivity. Workforce housing is critical for maintaining a reliable, skilled workforce that supports Hawaii's agriculture and food security initiatives.

How SB 498 Supports Agricultural Employees and Employers

Senate Bill 498 provides a framework to develop, incentivize, and facilitate the creation of workforce housing on or near agricultural lands, which will:

1. **Stabilize the Agricultural Workforce:** Providing affordable and accessible housing will help retain skilled workers, attract new talent to the agricultural sector, and reduce turnover rates that disrupt farm operations.
2. **Enhance Productivity:** By reducing commute times and ensuring workers have safe and stable living conditions, SB 498 supports a more reliable and productive workforce, benefiting farmers and the agricultural economy.
3. **Support Food Security Goals:** A stable agricultural workforce is essential to achieving Hawaii's goal of doubling local food production by 2030, as outlined in the Hawai'i 2050 Sustainability Plan.
4. **Reduce Barriers for Farmworkers:** Many farmworkers face financial challenges due to Hawaii's high cost of living. Workforce housing

alleviates this burden, allowing workers to focus on their contributions to local food production.

5. **Create Opportunities for Rural Communities:** Workforce housing projects will stimulate economic development in rural areas, support local businesses, and strengthen community ties.

ADC's Role in the Working Group

The inclusion of ADC on the proposed working group is a critical component of the success of this initiative. As the state's lead agency for agricultural land management and development, ADC is uniquely positioned to bring its expertise and resources to the table.

In its role on the working group, ADC will:

- **Identify Suitable Sites:** Work to identify lands under its management that are appropriate for workforce housing projects, ensuring proximity to active agricultural operations.
- **Collaborate with Stakeholders:** Partner with farmers, housing developers, local governments, and community organizations to design and implement housing solutions that are affordable, sustainable, and compatible with agricultural land use.
- **Promote Sustainability:** Advocate for the integration of renewable energy, water-efficient systems, and environmentally responsible practices in workforce housing developments.

- **Ensure Agricultural Compatibility:** Ensure that housing developments on agricultural lands do not interfere with or reduce agricultural productivity.
- **Support Funding Efforts:** Collaborate on securing federal, state, and private funding to support the development and maintenance of workforce housing projects.

Alignment with Statewide Goals

Senate Bill 498 aligns with several critical state priorities, including:

- **Hawai'i 2050 Sustainability Plan:** Workforce housing supports the agricultural workforce needed to increase local food production and reduce reliance on imported goods.
- **Economic Development:** Stable housing for farmworkers fosters economic growth in rural communities and helps sustain local farming operations.
- **Social Equity:** Providing affordable housing ensures that farmworkers and their families can live with dignity, stability, and access to basic services.

Conclusion

The passage of Senate Bill 498 is essential for addressing the housing needs of Hawaii's agricultural workforce and supporting the broader goals of food security, economic resilience, and sustainability. By investing in workforce housing and establishing a collaborative working group with ADC's

involvement, Hawaii will strengthen its agricultural sector, support local farmers, and create opportunities for farmworkers to thrive.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of this measure.



LAND USE COMMISSION

Komikina Ho'ohana 'Āina

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & TOURISM

Ka 'Oihana Ho'omōhala Pā'oihana, 'Imi Wai wai a Ho'omāka'ika'i

JOSH GREEN, MD
GOVERNOR

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Statement of
Daniel E. Orodenker
Executive Officer
State Land Use Commission

Before the
House Committee on Housing

Wednesday February 5, 2025
9:00 AM
State Capitol, Room 430 and Video Conference

In consideration of
HB1294

RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Chair Evslin; Vice Chair Miyake; and members of the House Committee on Housing:

The proposed measure would require the Department of Agriculture (“DOA”) to establish an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group that includes the chairperson of the Land Use Commission (“LUC”).

The LUC has not taken an official position on the measure at this time.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
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TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2025
9:00 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 430

HOUSE BILL NO. 1294
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING.

Chair Evslin, Vice Chair Miyake and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on House Bill No. 1294 that requires the Department of Agriculture (Department) to establish a 29-member Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group to address the "shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State". The bill requires an interim report to the Legislature prior to the 2027 session and the final report by the 2028 session. The Department is to provide administrative support to the Working Group. There are two separate appropriations of \$800,000 each for FYs 25-26 and 26-27 to gather the necessary data and prepare the required report, including any consultation fees and related expenses. The Department appreciates this measure's intent and offers comments.

The Department recommends that an early task of the Task Force, once established, is to gather data and information and survey farm operators to assess the realistic demand for farm workers. This information would inform a targeted rather than broad assessment of agricultural workforce housing needs. For instance, in 2022, 59 percent of Hawaii's 6,569 farms (federal definition) made less than \$10,000 a year in revenue from agricultural product sales. We do not know if these lower-income farm operations are able to hire farm workers, much less afford to build and operate on-farm worker housing, or be able to participate in alternative worker housing. A possible solution may be congregate living facilities located in the vicinity of where these small farm operations are aggregated.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony.





February 1, 2025

To: Chair Luke Evslin, Vice Chair Tyson Miyake, and House Members of the Committee,

Subject: **HB 1294**, Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing

Aloha,

I am writing to express my **support** for HB 1294, which seeks to establish more affordable housing opportunities for our state's agricultural workers. As someone who has spent a lot of time working on agricultural land in Waiāhole Valley, I have firsthand seen the importance of access to housing for farmers, and how imposition to housing opportunities for agricultural workers can be detrimental to the broader community that depends on their labor.

Access to farmer housing in Hawai'i must be addressed as a means to provide support and suitable living opportunities for many of Hawai'i's agricultural workers. The passing of this bill is important due to the role that our state's agricultural workforce places in the stability and access to food security for many local families. Ensuring that farmers have stable living conditions is critical to ensuring that our food security is being protected and maintained as Hawai'i's food security continues to grow.

Mahalo nui for your consideration and review.

Mahalo,

Lea iaea & the Food+ Policy Team
#fixourfoodsystem

The Food+ Policy internship develops student advocates who learn work skills while increasing civic engagement to become emerging leaders. We focus on good food systems policy because we see the importance and potential of the food system in combating climate change and increasing the health, equity, and resiliency of Hawai'i communities.

In 2025, the cohort of interns are undergraduate and graduate students and young professionals working in the food system. They are a mix of traditional and nontraditional students, including parents and veterans, who have backgrounds in education, farming, public health, nutrition, and Hawaiian culture.



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Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminska
Kaua'i

Aloha Chair Evslin, Vice Chair Miyake, and Members of the House Housing Committee,

The Hawai'i Farmers Union is a 501(c)(5) agricultural advocacy nonprofit representing a network of over 2,500 family farmers and their supporters across the Hawaiian Islands. **HFUU supports HB1294.**

The establishment of an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group by the Department of Agriculture, as outlined in HB1294, is a timely and necessary initiative for addressing the persistent shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in Hawaii. The agricultural sector is an essential pillar of our local economy, and the ability to provide adequate housing for farmworkers is crucial for sustaining and enhancing this industry. Safe, affordable, and accessible housing solutions directly improve the quality of life for agricultural workers, increase workforce stability, and support productivity on our farms.

Furthermore, the requirement for the Working Group to submit reports to the Legislature ensures that there will be ongoing assessment, accountability, and progress tracking of this initiative. By doing so, it creates an opportunity for continuous feedback and improvement, helping to make informed decisions that best serve our agricultural communities. Additionally, the appropriation of funds to support this endeavor signals a committed investment in addressing these longstanding issues, ultimately fostering a more resilient agricultural workforce and strengthening our local food systems.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union



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February 5, 2025

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

TESTIMONY ON HB 1294
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Conference Room 430 & Videoconference
9:00 AM

Aloha Chair Evslin, Vice-Chair Miyake, and Members of the Committee:

I am Brian Miyamoto, Executive Director of the Hawai'i Farm Bureau (HFB). Organized since 1948, the HFB is comprised of 1,800 farm family members statewide and serves as Hawai'i's voice of agriculture to protect, advocate, and advance the social, economic, and educational interests of our diverse agricultural community.

The Hawai'i Farm Bureau supports HB 1294, which requires the Department of Agriculture to establish an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State.

HFB recognizes the need for agricultural workforce housing and believes that affordable housing is necessary to attract farm workers. This has been a major shortfall as we try to address the labor needs for agriculture and is a limiting factor for the growth of agriculture in Hawai'i.

The shortage of willing and able workers, the need for affordable housing for farm workers, and competition from alternative employment are several of the pressing farm-labor-related issues that need to be addressed.

The lack of affordable housing for farmers and farm labor impedes increasing food and non-food agricultural production in Hawai'i. There is a need to develop housing for farmers and farm employees while ensuring that the housing is used in conjunction with an active farm and occupied by bona fide farmers and farm employees.

An Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group can help identify the agricultural workforce housing needs in each County and help identify the barriers to meeting the housing needs for farm and ranch businesses in Hawai'i.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of this measure.