
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that agricultural
2 workforce housing is essential to developing and sustaining the
3 workforce needed to move Hawaii's agricultural sector forward.
4 Agriculture across the State, particularly on the neighbor
5 islands, faces persistent labor shortages driven in part by
6 limited and high-cost housing options that make it difficult to
7 recruit and retain workers. Without reliable and proximate
8 housing, farms struggle to maintain stable operations, expand
9 production, or meet institutional and local food demand.

10 The legislature further finds that agricultural workforce
11 housing produces broad public benefits that extend far beyond
12 individual employers. These benefits include improved food
13 security, greater production reliability, strengthened rural and
14 neighbor island economies, enhanced worker safety, and more
15 resilient communities. Because these benefits accrue statewide
16 and support the State's long-term goals for food production and
17 economic diversification, it is appropriate to recognize



1 agricultural workforce housing as a public good worthy of
2 incentive, rather than impose new regulatory mandates on
3 farmers.

4 The legislature also finds that Hawaii's agricultural
5 workforce is experiencing significant decline and demographic
6 pressure. According to the United States Department of
7 Agriculture's 2022 Census of Agriculture, the total number of
8 farms in Hawaii has decreased by approximately ten per cent over
9 the most recent reporting period, and nearly half of the State's
10 agricultural producers are sixty-five years of age or older.

11 These trends underscore the urgent need for policies that
12 attract, retain, and stabilize the next generation of
13 agricultural workers. Workforce housing remains one of the most
14 critical barriers to building a reliable agricultural labor
15 force, especially on the neighbor islands where housing scarcity
16 and high costs pose substantial challenges.

17 The purpose of this Act is to support Hawaii's agricultural
18 workforce by incorporating agricultural workforce housing as a
19 scored public benefit within existing state evaluation and
20 decision-making processes.



1 SECTION 2. (a) Any state agency administering
2 agricultural leases, licenses, development programs, or
3 procurement involving agricultural products, including but not
4 limited to the department of agriculture and biosecurity and the
5 agribusiness development corporation, shall award additional
6 points or preferences to agricultural projects that voluntarily
7 provide:

8 (1) On-site or proximate workforce housing for
9 agricultural workers; or
10 (2) Formal partnerships that secure housing for a portion
11 of the agricultural workforce associated with the
12 project.

13 (b) To qualify for additional points or preferences under
14 subsection (a), an agricultural project shall demonstrate plans
15 to provide housing for at least twenty per cent of the
16 agricultural workforce associated with the project; provided
17 that state agencies under subsection (a) may authorize:

18 (1) Phased implementation over time;
19 (2) Scaled requirements based on farm size, project type,
20 or labor needs; and



1 (3) Region-specific flexibility to account for neighbor
2 island conditions, available housing stock, and
3 infrastructure capacity.

4 (c) State agencies may update existing scoring rubrics,
5 guidelines, or program rules to implement this section without
6 the need for additional statutory authority.

7 (d) Nothing in this Act shall be construed to:

8 (1) Create a mandate that agricultural operators provide
9 workforce housing;

10 (2) Penalize applicants that do not provide workforce
11 housing; or

12 (3) Supersede or alter existing health, safety, or land-
13 use requirements applicable to housing development.

14 (e) For the purposes of this section:

15 "Agricultural project" means any agricultural,

16 aquacultural, or agroforestry project applying for or
17 participating in a:

18 (1) State agricultural land lease or license;

19 (2) State-supported agricultural development program; or

20 (3) State procurement, grant, or institutional purchasing

21 contract that includes agricultural production.



1 "Agricultural workforce housing" means on-site, proximate,
2 or partnered housing arrangements intended to accommodate
3 agricultural workers employed by, contracted with, or directly
4 supporting an agricultural project.

5 "State agency" means all executive departments, boards, and
6 commissions of the State and all public corporations created by
7 the legislature. "State agency" does not include any contractor
8 with the State.

9 SECTION 3. The department of agriculture and biosecurity
10 shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations,
11 including any proposed legislation, to the legislature no later
12 than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session
13 of 2027. The report shall include:

14 (1) Implementation of the incentive scoring provisions in
15 this Act;
16 (2) The number of applicants that received additional
17 points or preference;
18 (3) Challenges encountered; and
19 (4) Recommendations for improving or expanding the
20 incentive framework.

21 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2026.



H.B. NO. 2495

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INTRODUCED BY:


JAN 28 2026



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Report Title:

State Agencies; DAB; Agribusiness Development Corporation; Agricultural Workforce Housing Incentives; Agricultural Leases; State Procurement; Preferences

Description:

Requires state agencies, including the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity and Agribusiness Development Corporation, that administer agricultural leases, licenses, development programs, or procurement involving agricultural products to award points or preferences to agricultural projects incorporating agricultural workforce housing. Requires a report to the Legislature.

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