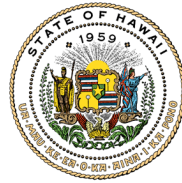


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE & BIOSECURITY
KA 'OIHANA MAHI'AI A KIA'I MEAOLA
1428 South King Street
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96814-2512
Phone: (808) 973-9560 FAX: (808) 973-9613

**TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
AND HOUSING**

**WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026
3:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224**

**HOUSE BILL NO.1604, HOUSE DRAFT 2
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING**

Chairs Gabbard and Chang, Vice Chairs Richards and Hashimoto and Members of the Committees:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 1604, House Draft 2 that establishes an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State. An interim and final report are due to the 2028 and 2029 Legislatures, respectively. The bill provides for a single appropriation in FY26-27 for data collection, report preparation, and hiring consultants. The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department) offers comments.

HD2 included as the first task of the Task Force, the gathering of data and information and survey of farm operators to assess the realistic demand for farm workers. This information will 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 building and operating 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 testify on this measure.



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

‘Ōlelo Hō‘ike ‘Aha Kau Kānāwai

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 1604 HD2

RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Ke Kōmike ‘Aha Kenekoa o ka ‘Oihana Mahi‘ai a me ke Ao Kūlohelohe
(Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment)

Ke Kōmike ‘Aha Kenekoa o ke Kuleana Hale Noho
(Senate Committee on Housing)

Ke Kapikala o Hawai‘i

Malaki 18, 2026

3:00PM

Lumi 224

Aloha e Chairs Gabbard and Chang, Vice Chairs Richards and Hashimoto, and Members of the Senate Committees on Agriculture and Environment and Housing:

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA) **SUPPORTS HB1604 HD2**, which establishes an Agriculture Workforce Housing Working Group to examine the need for and any barriers to the construction of agricultural workforce housing in Hawai‘i.

Agriculture is foundational to Hawai‘i’s economic resilience, food security, and cultural perpetuation. For Native Hawaiians, ‘āina-based livelihoods are inseparable from identity, health, and ‘ike kūpuna. In fact, one of the pathways to Native Hawaiian economic wellbeing that OHA has committed to advance is finding new markets for Native Hawaiian products, including farming products, that can provide families with a livable wage¹. However, the viability of agriculture in Hawai‘i is constrained by the lack of training programs, start up costs and barriers to entry for new farmers, not least of which is the cost of farmable land. All these barriers are exacerbated by the high cost of housing which makes it difficult for new farmers to invest the time needed before a start-up farm becomes profitable.

Accordingly, OHA support the working group’s comprehensive scope of work, beginning with the identification and assessment of the “agricultural workforce” in each

¹ 1 See OHA Strategic Plan available at: <https://www.oha.org/about/mana-to-maui-ola/>

county. The identity (long-time resident, temporary resident), age, and other social demographic factors will help determine the type of housing needed (e.g., rental, rent to own, affordable purchase, etc.) and guide answers to other questions. As the working group gathers data, surveys farm operators, and assesses housing demand, OHA strongly recommends that all data collected and reported be disaggregated with specific identification of Native Hawaiian agricultural operators and workforce participants where feasible and appropriate. Disaggregated data will identify disparities in access and ensure that Native Hawaiian farmers and agricultural workers are equitably benefiting from any future programs.

Additionally, OHA respectfully requests we be invited to serve as a member of the working group. OHA has long advocated for policies that expand opportunities for Native Hawaiian farmers, ranchers, and food producers. Through grantmaking, loans, and advocacy, OHA has supported initiatives that increase access to land, water, and funds for Native Hawaiian agricultural practitioners. OHA has experience in housing policy, land use issues, and community-based development; direct relationships with Native Hawaiian farmers; and a statutory and constitutional mandate to advocate for the betterment of the conditions of Native Hawaiians. OHA's participation in the working group ensures that agricultural workforce housing strategies are responsive to the needs of Native Hawaiian agricultural workers.

For the reasons stated above, OHA respectfully urges this committee to **PASS HB1604 HD2** with attention to our suggestions.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to testify on this critical issue.



P.O. Box 253, Kunia, Hawai'i 96759
Phone: (808) 848-2074; Fax: (808) 848-1921
e-mail info@hfbf.org; www.hfbf.org

March 18, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

TESTIMONY ON HB 1604, HD2
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
3:00 PM

Aloha Chairs Gabbard and Chang, Vice-Chairs Richards and Hashimoto, and Members of the Committees:

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 1604, HD2, which establishes an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State.

Workforce housing remains a significant challenge affecting farm viability, labor retention, and the ability of agricultural operations to expand. Farmers across Hawai'i consistently identify access to appropriate and affordable workforce housing as a limiting factor in recruiting and retaining employees. Despite prior efforts to study this issue, housing constraints continue to impact agricultural productivity statewide.

HB 1604, HD2 provides a collaborative and practical forum to bring together state agencies, counties, agricultural organizations, and housing stakeholders to better understand agricultural workforce housing needs and identify potential solutions. HFB appreciates that the working group includes agricultural representation and emphasizes coordination among agencies responsible for land use, housing, and agricultural development.

HFB believes it is important that any recommendations focus on housing that directly supports bona fide agricultural operations, respects county land-use authority, and avoids unintended impacts on surrounding agricultural activities. Solutions should be flexible, county-specific, and responsive to the diverse needs of Hawai'i's agricultural workforce.

HFB looks forward to participating in the working group and continuing to work with the Legislature and state agencies to identify practical, workable strategies that support agricultural workforce housing while strengthening Hawai'i's agricultural industry.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

March 18, 2026

TO: Chair Gabbard and Members of the Committee on Agriculture and Environment
Chair Chang and Members of the Senate Committee on Housing

RE: HB 1604 HD2, Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing

Dear Chairs Gabbard, Chang and Committee Members,

Housing Hawai'i's Future is a nonprofit dedicated to creating opportunities for Hawai'i's next generation by ending the workforce housing shortage.

We support House Bill 1604 HD2, with amendments. This bill would establish an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State.

Hawai'i's housing shortage has direct and compounding impacts on the agricultural sector, particularly through the lack of attainable and proximate worker housing in rural communities. Farms across the state report persistent difficulty recruiting and retaining agricultural workers. This is often not because of a lack of jobs, but because workers cannot find housing within a reasonable distance or price point.

The establishment of an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group represents a positive step toward addressing this issue. By convening a diverse set of stakeholders from agriculture and government, the bill sets in motion a coordinated effort to identify specific agricultural housing needs and tools to meet those needs.

In the interest of ensuring all perspectives are represented, we respectfully recommend that the working group be amended to explicitly include **at least one representative of an organization working to address Hawai'i's housing shortage.**

Please advance HB1604 HD2.

Thank you,



Lee Wang
Executive Director
Housing Hawai'i's Future
lee@hawaiisfuture.org



Perry Arrasmith
Director of Policy
Housing Hawai'i's Future
perry@hawaiisfuture.org

HB-1604-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/15/2026 7:03:12 PM

Testimony for AEN on 3/18/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Harriet Witt	Testifying for Hawaii Farmers Union/Haleakala Chapter	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

We need this if we want to declare our food independence of the mainland!



Officers

Kaipo Kekona
State President

Christian Zuckerman
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

Reba Lopez
Treasurer

Chapter Presidents

Kelii Gannet
Kohala, Hawai'i

East Hawai'i

Puna, Hawai'i

Ka'u, Hawai'i

Maureen Datta
Kona, Hawai'i

Gina Lind
Hāna, Maui

Mason Scharer
Haleakalā, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahālāwai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

Kilia Avelino-Purdy
Moloka'i

Negus Manna
Lāna'i

India Clark
North Shore, O'ahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, O'ahu

Rachel LaDrig
Waimānalo, O'ahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, O'ahu

Natalie Urminska
Kaua'i

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Senate Agriculture and Environment 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. **HFU supports HB1604.**

By establishing an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group HB1604 seeks to create a dedicated body that can delve into the complex challenges faced by our agricultural workers when it comes to securing housing. The lack of adequate housing options not only affects the quality of life for agricultural workers but also impacts the overall productivity and sustainability of Hawaii's farming industry. By prioritizing this issue, the working group can develop targeted strategies and solutions that will directly benefit both the agricultural workforce and the wider farming community.

The establishment of a working group tasked to not only assess but also actively address these housing challenges is both timely and necessary. Thorough review of zoning policies and exploration of financial incentives is a promising strategy to encourage housing solutions. However, we suggest the bill indicate how recommendations from the working group will be prioritized and implemented post-dissolution to ensure that findings do not merely culminate in reports but translate into actionable policy changes.

HB1604 promises progress through thoughtful examination and action, ensuring that our agricultural workforce is adequately housed and supported in their essential roles within the state.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Hunter Heavilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment

Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair

Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Housing

Senator Stanley Chang, Chair

Senator Troy N. Hashimoto, Vice Chair

Wednesday, March 18, 2026, at 3:00PM

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

RE: HB1604 HD2 Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing

Aloha e Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, Chair Chang, Vice Chair Hashimoto, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Sherry Menor, President and CEO of the Chamber of Commerce Hawaii ("The Chamber"). The Chamber supports House Bill 1604 House Draft 2 (HB1604 HD2), which establishes an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State. Requires reports to the Legislature.

HB1604 HD2 aligns with our 2030 Blueprint for Hawaii: An Economic Action Plan, specifically under the policy pillar for 21st Century Agriculture. The state's agricultural sector is critical to long term economic diversification and food systems security. This legislation addresses persistent agricultural workforce challenges that include access to safe, affordable, and proximate housing. By addressing these challenges, state can strengthen the agricultural labor value proposition by creating meaningful impact on this workforce's quality of life and cost of living.

Affordable and accessible housing for the agricultural workforce is essential to sustaining and growing Hawaii's agricultural economy. Without adequate housing, employers struggle to recruit and retain workers, thereby limiting production capacity and weakening the viability of the agriculture sector. The working group proposed in this legislation is composed of the stakeholders needed for effective collaboration around zoning, county-level considerations, and financial incentives. Chamber believes this working group will be most effective in devising sensible incentives that can encourage this investment for the agricultural sector.

The Chamber of Commerce Hawaii is the state's leading business advocacy organization, dedicated to improving Hawaii's economy and securing Hawaii's future for growth and opportunity. Our mission is to foster a vibrant economic climate. As such, we support initiatives and policies that align with the 2030

Blueprint for Hawaii that create opportunities to strengthen overall competitiveness, improve the quantity and skills of available workforce, diversify the economy, and build greater local wealth.

We respectfully ask to pass House Bill 1604 House Draft 2. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



MAUI

CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

VOICE OF BUSINESS

**HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON
AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT AND COMMITTEE ON HOUSING
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM 224
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026 AT 3:00 P.M.**

To The Honorable Senator Mike Gabbard, Chair
The Honorable Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Agriculture & Environment

To The Honorable Senator Stanley Chang, Chair
The Honorable Senator Troy N. Hashimoto, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Agriculture & Environment

SUPPORT HB1604 HD2 RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Affordable housing has been a top priority of the Maui Chamber of Commerce for years, given the current housing crisis. We support HB1604 HD2 because it proposes the creation of a dedicated working group within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to tackle the unique challenges faced by agricultural workers in securing safe and affordable housing.

While Maui County has been making progress with legislation geared toward allowing more agricultural worker housing, the establishment of a statewide Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group is a positive step toward identifying and overcoming regulatory, financial, and land use barriers that have long hindered the development of this critical housing segment. By bringing together stakeholders from relevant agencies and sectors, the working group can help ensure that policy recommendations are informed by on-the-ground realities and best practices. We believe that a coordinated, cross-sector approach is essential to developing actionable solutions that will expedite the delivery of housing for agricultural workers, who are vital to the state's food security and rural economies.

We respectfully recommend that the working group's scope explicitly include consideration of innovative housing models, such as modular homes, tiny homes, and container homes, and that it examine opportunities to streamline permitting and zoning processes. We also recommend that stakeholders from the neighbor islands are included in the working group.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share our support of HB1604 HD2.

Sincerely,

Pamela Tumpap
President

To advance and promote a healthy economic environment for business, advocating for a responsive government and quality education, while preserving Maui's unique community characteristics.

HB-1604-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/16/2026 8:37:46 AM

Testimony for AEN on 3/18/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daniel Nellis	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dole Food Company Hawaii supports this bill and looks forward to some definitive recommendations from the work that is being funded by this bill.

HB-1604-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/17/2026 6:43:21 AM

Testimony for AEN on 3/18/2026 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Glen Kagamida	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

STRONG SUPPORT!!! MAHALO!