

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

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS

**FRIDAY, JANUARY 30, 2026
9:30 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 325**

**HOUSE BILL NO.1604
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING**

Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 1604 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 of \$250,000 in FY26-27 for data collection, report preparation, and hiring consultants. The Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity (Department) 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 building and operating onfarm 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.



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE
REGULAR SESSION OF 2026

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

Rep. Cory M. Chun, Chair
Rep. Matthias Kusch, Vice Chair

Friday, January 30, 2026 9:30 AM
Conference Room 325
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

RE: HB1604 RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

My name is Eric S. Tanouye and I am the President for the Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association. HFNA is a statewide umbrella organization with approximately 350 members. Our membership is made up with breeders, hybridizers, propagators, growers, shippers, wholesalers, retailers, educators, and the allied industry, which supports our efforts in agriculture.

The Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association (HFNA) **SUPPORTS House Bill 1604** 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.

We appreciate any support to our growers and their employees to have available affordable housing. This will help those who work in agriculture and allow our industries to continue.

We ask that you support our industry and agriculture, so that we may continue to bring the beauty of Hawaii to others through flowers and ornamentals.

If you have any questions at this time, I would be happy to discuss them and can be reached by phone at 808-959-3535 ext 2627, cell 960-1433 and email eric@greenpointnursery.com.

Supporting Agriculture and Hawaii,
Eric S. Tanouye
President
Hawaii Floriculture and Nursery Association



P.O. Box 253, Kunia, Hawai'i 96759
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January 30, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & FOOD SYSTEMS

TESTIMONY ON HB 1604
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Conference Room 325 & Videoconference
9:30 AM

Aloha Chair Chun, Vice-Chair Kusch, 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 1604, 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 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.

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Kaua'i



Aloha Chair Chun, Vice Chair Kusch, and Members of the House Agriculture & Food Systems 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 strongly 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 Heaivilin
Advocacy Director
Hawai'i Farmers Union

HB-1604

Submitted on: 1/28/2026 9:45:35 AM
Testimony for AGR on 1/30/2026 9:30:00 AM

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

Comments:

Good idea. Strong support!!!

HB-1604

Submitted on: 1/28/2026 10:21:02 PM
Testimony for AGR on 1/30/2026 9:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keoni DeFranco	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and members of the Committee,

My name is Keoni DeFranco, and I submit this testimony in my personal capacity in strong support of HB1604.

Across Hawai‘i, the lack of affordable and accessible housing for agricultural workers continues to be a major barrier to sustaining local food production. Farmers and farmworkers are essential to our state’s food security, yet many struggle to live near their workplaces or remain in agriculture due to high housing costs and limited options in rural areas.

Establishing an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group is an important step toward understanding county-specific needs, identifying existing resources, and developing practical policy and financing solutions. Bringing together state agencies, agricultural organizations, and experts will help create coordinated strategies that support both farmers and the broader agricultural economy.

Investing in workforce housing solutions is critical to strengthening Hawai‘i’s local food systems, retaining agricultural workers, and building long-term resilience.

I respectfully urge the Committee to support HB1604 and move this important measure forward.

Mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully,
Keoni DeFranco