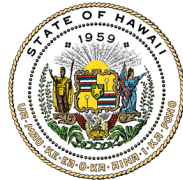


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



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

SHARON HURD
Chairperson
Board of Agriculture & Biosecurity

DEAN M. MATSUKAWA
Deputy to the Chairperson

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

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2026
3:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224**

**SENATE BILL NO. 2405
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING**

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards and Members of the Committee:

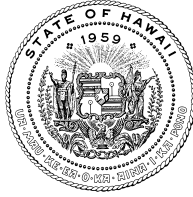
Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 2405 that establishes an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State. An interim and final report are 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 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.

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

SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

February 04, 2026 at 3:00 p.m.

State Capitol, Room 224

In consideration of

SENATE BILL 2405

RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING.

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and members of the Committee.

HHFDC **supports** Senate Bill 2405, which establishes an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group to address the shortage of agricultural workforce housing in the State.

Hawaii's agricultural workforce struggles with finding affordable housing. Farm businesses report that the lack of affordable housing opportunities hinders worker recruitment and retention, production expansion, and long-term business operations.

HHFDC is named as a member of the working group under this bill, and we fully commit to participating actively in the group's work.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR



WENDY GADY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
HUI HO'OU LU AINA MAHIAI

TESTIMONY OF WENDY L. GADY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT
February 4, 2026
3:00 p.m.
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

SENATE BILL NO. 2405
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Chairperson Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Committee:

The Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) appreciates the intent of S.B. 2405, which would establish an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group to evaluate barriers, identify solutions, and recommend strategies to expand housing options for agricultural workers across Hawai'i. ADC would like to offer comments on the bill.

Access to stable and affordable housing is one of the most significant challenges facing Hawai'i's agricultural workforce. Farmers and agricultural employers consistently report that the lack of nearby workforce housing limits their ability to recruit and retain workers, expand production, and sustain long-term operations. This challenge directly affects the State's ability to increase local food production and meet statutory and policy mandates related to food security.

Hawai'i has set clear goals to strengthen local food systems and reduce dependence on imported food. However, without adequate housing for agricultural workers, these goals are difficult to achieve. Farms cannot scale production without a stable workforce, and workforce shortages result in reduced planting, delayed harvesting, and underutilization of available agricultural lands.

In practical terms, the absence of agricultural workforce housing becomes a limiting factor on food output, regardless of how much land or water infrastructure is available.

ADC was created to steward agricultural lands and irrigation systems, so they remain productive and economically viable. However, the success of these systems ultimately depends on people—skilled workers who can live near where they work. When housing is unavailable or unaffordable, agricultural operations are forced to scale back or consolidate, leaving lands fallow and undermining the State's food production capacity. This not only affects individual farms, but also weakens the broader food system and increases reliance on imported products.

The establishment of a working group is an appropriate and timely step to address this complex issue. Agricultural workforce housing intersects with land use policy, infrastructure capacity, water and wastewater systems, permitting, financing, and community compatibility. A coordinated, multi-agency forum will allow the State to:

- Identify regulatory and permitting barriers.
- Evaluate infrastructure and siting constraints.
- Explore financing and delivery models appropriate for rural and agricultural areas; and
- Align housing strategies with food security and agricultural development goals.

To be an effective partner in the working group, ADC will need administrative support to assist the working group's interactions. The meetings will require support staff to prepare meeting agendas, materials, and track and document the discussion. ADC will need administrative staff for the before and after the working group sessions. ADC requests additional funds to cover the cost of travel for site visits by the working group members and the consulting fees. ADC recommends an additional \$50,000 to S. B. 2405.

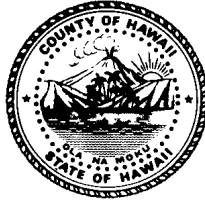
ADC believes this effort will complement existing initiatives focused on food system resilience and rural development. Agricultural workforce housing is not

solely a housing issue—it is a workforce issue, a food production issue, and a land stewardship issue. Without addressing workforce housing, the State will continue to face structural limits on its ability to expand agricultural output and fulfill its food system mandates.

For these reasons, ADC understands the intent of S.B. 2405 and appreciates the Legislature's recognition that agricultural workforce housing requires focused attention and coordinated solutions. We look forward to working with the members of the working group to contribute agricultural land and infrastructure perspectives to this important effort.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this measure.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor



Benson Medina
Director

Dennis Lin
Deputy Director

County of Hawai'i

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

25 Aupuni Street, Room 1301 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720-4252
(808) 961-8366 • Fax (808) 935-1205
E-mail: chresdev@co.hawaii.hi.us

February 3, 2026
HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

WEDNESDAY, February 4, 2026
3:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224

TESTIMONY ON SB 2405
Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards and Members of the Committee,

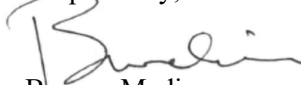
I am Benson Medina, Director of the Department of Research and Development, County of Hawai'i. One of the agricultural objectives of this department is to support collaboration, innovation, resource development, and programmatic sustainability throughout the food system to reduce food waste, improve producer viability and resilience, develop workforce development pathways, or increase access to locally produced food among low-income residents.

The County of Hawai'i provides written testimony in **SUPPORT of SB2405** to establish 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.

For farmworkers, safe, affordable housing close to the workplace reduces travel time, increases safety, and contributes to overall wellbeing. Poor or overcrowded housing can lead to health and safety concerns, and housing insecurity is associated with a higher risk of chronic health conditions and lower access to primary and preventative healthcare (Martin et al. 2019; Gu et al. 2023). A 2025 statewide survey on land access found that housing was the second top concern among producers, with either difficulty or a complete inability to access housing on or directly adjacent to farmland (Agriculture Stewardship Hawai'i, 2025).

Creating sufficient and timely farmworker and low-income housing on Hawai'i Island is likely to entail careful examination and streamlining of the planning, permitting, and building process. **We kindly request that a representative from each of the four counties be invited to the working group proposed in SB2405 to help determine the specific housing needs of each agricultural workforce within each county.** Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **SUPPORT of SB2405.**

Respectfully,


Benson Medina
Director



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 strongly supports SB2405.**

By establishing an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group SB2405 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.

SB2405 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



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

February 4, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON SB 2405
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
3:00 PM

Aloha Chair Gabbard, Vice-Chair Richards, 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 SB 2405, 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.

SB 2405 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.



February 3, 2026

To: Chair Mike Gabbard, and Vice Chair Tim Richards III and the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment

Subject: **SB2405**, Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing

Aloha,

I am writing in **support of SB2405** which establishes an agricultural workforce housing working group to address the shortages and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the state. A cross-sector collaborative working group can create opportunities for agricultural workforce housing that are aligned with the best interests of communities, farmworkers, landowners, and the larger agricultural system in Hawai'i.

I urge this committee to pass SB2405 to establish an agricultural workforce housing working group. Hawai'i's food system is at a critical point and faces challenges at many levels in reaching food security goals. Affordable and accessible housing for farmworkers is foundational in increasing Hawai'i's capacity for locally sourced food. A working group that aims to create space that suits farmowners, communities, and farmworkers is an essential next step.

Mahalo,
Sydney Haas & 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 2026, 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.



MAUI
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
VOICE OF BUSINESS

**HEARING BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE & ENVIRONMENT
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, SENATE CONFERENCE ROOM 224
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 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

SUPPORT SB2405 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 SB2405 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.

In addition, the bill's requirement for regular reporting to the Legislature will enhance transparency and accountability, ensuring that progress is measured and that barriers are promptly identified and addressed. The appropriation of funds to support the working group's efforts is also a necessary investment, as it will provide the resources needed to conduct thorough research, stakeholder engagement, and policy development.

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. These approaches have shown promise in other contexts and could help reduce costs and accelerate housing delivery.

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.

SB-2405

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 2:59:48 PM

Testimony for AEN on 2/4/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Keoni DeFranco, and I submit this testimony in strong support of SB2405, which establishes an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to address the ongoing shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in Hawai‘i.

Access to safe, affordable, and nearby housing remains one of the greatest barriers facing our farmers, agricultural workers, and ‘āina-based programs across the state. Whether working in food production, land restoration, or rural agricultural enterprises, many workers are forced to commute long distances or leave the industry altogether due to the lack of appropriate housing options. This directly impacts food security, workforce retention, and the long-term viability of Hawai‘i’s agricultural sector.

SB2405 takes a thoughtful and collaborative approach by bringing together key state agencies, agricultural organizations, and subject matter experts to assess workforce housing needs county by county. The bill’s focus on adaptive reuse of existing government resources, zoning and land use policy reforms, and mixed-use development opportunities near agricultural zones is especially important. These strategies recognize Hawai‘i’s land constraints while creating practical pathways to increase housing supply in proximity to where agricultural work actually occurs.

I also strongly support the working group’s charge to explore public-private partnerships and financial incentives, including potential tax credit programs, to encourage investment in agricultural workforce housing. Strategic incentives can help unlock private capital, support employer-led housing solutions, and accelerate the development of projects that might otherwise be financially unfeasible.

The appropriation included in SB2405 is critical to ensure that this working group can conduct meaningful research, engage stakeholders, and produce actionable recommendations rather than simply convening discussions. The interim and final reporting timelines will also help keep this effort focused on delivering real outcomes for the Legislature to consider.

As someone deeply involved in ‘āina-based agriculture, workforce training, and community economic development, I see firsthand how housing insecurity undermines our efforts to grow

local food systems and support the next generation of farmers and land stewards. Addressing agricultural workforce housing is essential not only for economic development, but for food sovereignty, rural sustainability, and the health of our communities.

SB2405 lays the groundwork for practical, coordinated, and long-term solutions to one of Hawai‘i’s most pressing agricultural challenges.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of SB2405.

Respectfully,
Keoni DeFranco

SB-2405

Submitted on: 2/3/2026 10:00:26 AM

Testimony for AEN on 2/4/2026 3:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

NEEDED!!!

Bill Number: SB 2405

Position: Oppose

Name: Christina Mendonza

Location: O‘ahu

Affiliation: Individual

I am opposing SB 2405 because this bill does not reflect the reality of agriculture in Hawai‘i, especially on O‘ahu. We keep hearing about “agricultural workforce housing,” but the truth is we don’t even have a real agricultural workforce. Most of our agricultural land isn’t being used for farming. It’s being used for luxury estates, gentleman farms, tax write-offs, and land banking. Hawai‘i imports almost all of its food. So who exactly are we building this housing for?

If we want to talk honestly about land use on O‘ahu, then we need to talk about golf courses. O‘ahu alone has a huge concentration of golf courses, part of the 40 statewide and some are owned by the City and County. These golf courses take up massive amounts of land and use drinking water every single day. They are toxic to our ‘āina, drenched in chemicals, and they get priority access to potable water while local families struggle and DHHL beneficiaries wait decades for housing. The Ala Wai Golf Course sits right next to one of the most polluted canals in the state, and somehow that is acceptable, but we are here discussing “agricultural workforce housing” for workers who barely exist.

This bill feels like another pathway to open agricultural land for development under the label of “workforce housing.” Meanwhile, the real issues are land misuse, water mismanagement, the collapse of local agriculture, and the prioritization of golf courses over people remain untouched. Housing is not the root problem. The entire agricultural system has been neglected for decades.

If the state wants to support agriculture, then fix agriculture first. Fix water access. Fix land access. Fix the zoning laws that make it impossible for real farmers to survive. Don’t create housing for a workforce that the state itself has failed to support. And don’t ignore the massive land and water footprint of golf courses while pretending agriculture is the priority.

For these reasons, I oppose SB 2405. Mahalo Nui for allowing me to testify.