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**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 HOUSING**

**FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2026  
9:00 AM  
CONFERENCE ROOM 430**

**HOUSE BILL NO.1604, HOUSE DRAFT 1  
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill No. 1604, House Draft 1 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.

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.

**OFFICE OF ECONOMIC REVITALIZATION**  
**KE KE'ENA HO'OMOHALA WAIWAI**  
**CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU**

711 KAPIOLANI BLVD., 12TH FLOOR • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813  
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DEBORAH ZYSMAN  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
HOPE PO'O

February 13, 2026

The Honorable Luke Evslin, Chair  
The Honorable Tyson Miyake, Vice-Chair  
and Members of the Committee on Housing  
House of Representatives  
415 South Beretania Street, Room 430  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

SUBJECT: Honolulu Office of Economic Revitalization Support for House Bill 1604 HD1  
Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing

Dear Chair Evslin, Vice-Chair Miyake, and members of the Committee:

The City & County of Honolulu Office of Economic Revitalization (OER) **supports** HB1604 HD1, which pertains to agriculture workforce housing. This bill 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.

Hawaii's high cost of living impacts many of our farmworkers. The 2025 Hawaii Housing Factbook, compiled by UHERO, stated that the median rent in Hawaii totals \$1,913, with 60% of households being able to cover the median rent without spending more than 30% of their income. In Hawaii, many of our farmworkers' average hourly pay falls short of the state survival wage of \$22.15 per hour. As a result, many farmers are considered Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed (ALICE), and are unable to afford basic expenses such as rent. The proposed Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group aims to support collaborative efforts to discuss the specific housing needs of our state's agricultural workforce, which is crucial to supporting the livelihood and retention of our farmworkers.

OER's Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Program is committed to helping smaller farmers thrive. This initiative aims to support the livelihoods of our farmers by addressing the shortages and challenges of agricultural workforce housing.

The Honorable Luke Evslin, Chair  
The Honorable Tyson Miyake, Vice-Chair  
and Members of the Committee on Housing  
February 13, 2026  
Page 2

Should there be any questions, please contact Alex Narrajos, Sustainable Agriculture and Food Systems Program Manager at (808) 768-2287 or via email at [alex.narrajos@honolulu.gov](mailto:alex.narrajos@honolulu.gov).

Sincerely,

Amy Asselbaye  
Executive Director



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Aloha Chair Evslyn, 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. **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



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February 13, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

**TESTIMONY ON HB 1604, HD1**  
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 1604, HD1**, 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, HD1 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 13, 2026

TO: Chair Chun and Members of the House Agriculture Committee  
RE: HB 1604, Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing

Dear Chair Chun 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, 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 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 include **at least one representative of an organization dedicated to addressing Hawai'i's housing shortage.**

**Please advance HB1604.**

Thank you,



Lee Wang  
Executive Director  
Housing Hawai'i's Future  
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Perry Arrasmith  
Director of Policy  
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