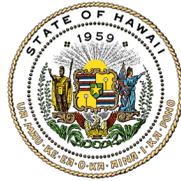


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

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

WRITTEN ONLY TESTIMONY

TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE AND BIOSECURITY

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2026
10:00 AM
CONFERENCE ROOM 308

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

Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and Members of the Committee:

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 HB1604 HD2

RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Ke Kōmike Hale o ka ‘Oihana ‘Imi Kālā

Ke Kapikala o Hawai‘i

Malaki 4, 2026

10:00AM

Lumi 308

Aloha e Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

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

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 well being that OHA has committed to advance is finding new markets for Native Hawaiian products, including farming products, that can provide families with a livable wage.¹ 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 supports the working group’s comprehensive scope of work, beginning with the identification and assessment of the “agricultural workforce” in each 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

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

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 HB1601 HD2** with attention to our suggestions.

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

**Testimony to the House Committee on Finance
Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair**

**Wednesday, March 4, 2026, at 10:00AM
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference**

RE: HB1604 HD2 Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing

Aloha e Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, 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. The construction of housing by any stakeholder is a significant investment. The 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 HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
HAWAII STATE CAPITOL, HOUSE CONFERENCE ROOM 308
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 4, 2026 AT 10:00 A.M.**

To The Honorable Senator Chris Todd, Chair
The Honorable Senator Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Finance

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.



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 4, 2026

HEARING BEFORE THE
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

TESTIMONY ON HB 1604, HD2
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
10:00 AM

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice-Chair Takenouchi, 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, 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.

Officers

Kaipo Kekona
State President



Christian Zuckerman
Vice-President

Maureen Datta
Secretary

Reba Lopez
Treasurer

Chapter Presidents

Kelii Gannet
Kohala, Hawaii

East Hawaii

Puna, Hawaii

Ka'u, Hawaii

Maureen Datta
Kona, Hawaii

Gina Lind
Hana, Maui

Mason Scharer
Haleakala, Maui

Kaiea Medeiros
Mauna Kahalawai,
Maui

Kaipo Kekona
Lahaina, Maui

Kilia Avelino-Purdy
Molokai

Negus Manna
Lana'i

India Clark
North Shore, Oahu

Christian Zuckerman
Wai'anae, Oahu

Rachel LaDrig
Waimanalo, Oahu

Vincent Kimura
Honolulu, Oahu

Natalie Urminska
Kauai

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Finance Committee,

The Hawaii 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
Hawaii Farmers Union



Housing Hawai'i's Future
PO Box 3043
Honolulu, HI 96802-3043

March 4, 2026

TO: Chair Todd and Members of the House Finance Committee
RE: HB 1604 HD2, Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing

Dear Chair Todd 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 not thanks to 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,

A stylized, circular signature in black ink, appearing to be the name "Lee Wang".

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name "Perry Arrasmith".

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

3 March, 2026

To Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi and Members of the Committee

Subject: **HB 1604 HD 2**

Aloha,

I respectfully submit testimony in support of HB1604, HD2, which establishes an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group within the Department of Agriculture and Biosecurity to study barriers, incentives, and solutions to the shortage of workforce housing for agricultural employees in Hawai'i. This working group will bring together state leadership, including agency heads and sector representatives, to examine innovative policy approaches, evaluate financial and regulatory tools, and develop actionable recommendations, including proposed legislation and potential incentives such as tax credits or financing mechanisms, to expand housing opportunities for those who feed our communities. From a finance perspective, the state's ability to retain and attract workers in agriculture is directly tied to economic stability, food security, and rural community sustainability. While this bill primarily creates an organizational and planning structure, its success will depend on the appropriation of adequate fiscal resources to support the working group's operations, research, and reporting requirements. Funding will be necessary to provide administrative support, convene stakeholders, commission data and economic analysis, and ensure timely production of interim and final reports to the Legislature. I urge the Committee on Finance to consider appropriating resources in the executive budget that reflect the importance of this initiative and the value it brings in identifying cost-effective, durable housing solutions for agricultural workers.

Additionally, the Committee can play a critical role in ensuring that the working group's recommendations align with broader state financial priorities, including housing affordability, workforce development, and rural economic development. By enabling robust fiscal engagement now, including support for feasibility studies, financial modeling, and exploration of public-private financing tools, the Legislature will be better positioned to evaluate future policy proposals with an informed understanding of costs, benefits, and long-term economic return on investment. Making an early investment in planning and analysis will help avoid unfunded mandates or piecemeal approaches that fail to address systemic challenges in agricultural housing. In closing, I respectfully urge the Committee on Finance to support HB1604, HD2.

Mahalo,

Carlin Rose McFadden & 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.

HB-1604-HD-2

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 7:02:23 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/4/2026 10:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

STRONG SUPPORT!!!

This working group could develop ways to help our local farmers make Hawaii food secure.

Mahalo!