



**STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF PLANNING
& SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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Statement of
MARY ALICE EVANS
Interim Director
Office of Planning and Sustainable Development
before the
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

Wednesday, February 7, 2024
1:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 224

in consideration of
SB 2961
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING.

Chair Gabbard, Vice Chair Richards, and Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Environment.

The Office of Planning and Sustainable Development (OPSD) **offers comments** on SB 2961, which would establish a multi-sector agricultural workforce housing working group to examine a range of tools and strategies to address the need for agricultural workforce housing in the State.

OPSD recognizes farmworker housing has been a long-standing concern for the agricultural sector in Hawai'i, and that overcoming the shortage of farmworker housing is vital to the long-term viability of agricultural producers.

OPSD stands ready to participate in the working group. Such a working group would be useful in determining how we, as a State, could collectively meet the industry's need for farmworker housing while protecting agricultural lands from non-agricultural residential uses.

OPSD notes that the Department of Agriculture would need sufficient funding to support a working group of this size and to fund the additional studies required to develop recommendations for viable tools and approaches for the provision of agricultural workforce housing.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



WENDY L. GADY
Executive Director

STATE OF HAWAII
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
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**TESTIMONY OF WENDY L. GADY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**

**BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND
ENVIRONMENT**

Wednesday, February 7, 2024
1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 224 & Videoconference

**SENATE BILL NO. 2961
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING**

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill No. 2961, which requires the Department of Agriculture to establish an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State.

The Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC) believes the lack of agricultural workforce housing, especially in the rural communities, is one of the biggest bottlenecks in agriculture that is often overlooked. Farmworkers cope with a range of problems including high costs that typically do not fit their incomes, substandard quality, crowded housing conditions, and the need for short-term housing during the harvest and planting seasons.

ADC supports the establishment of an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group to combat the agricultural workforce housing crisis. ADC appreciates and supports the Legislature's efforts to tackle this longstanding problem, which inhibits the growth of Hawaii's agriculture sector.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
Governor

SYLVIA LUKE
Lt. Governor



SHARON HURD
Chairperson, Board of Agriculture

DEXTER KISHIDA
Deputy to the Chairperson

State of Hawai'i
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TESTIMONY OF SHARON HURD
CHAIRPERSON, BOARD OF AGRICULTURE

BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 7, 2024
1:00 PM
CONFERENCE ROOM 224

SENATE BILL NO. 2961
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 2961 that requires the Department of Agriculture (Department) to establish a 35-member (minimum) Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group (Working Group), co-chaired by the Chairperson of the Department of Agriculture and the Chairperson of the Agribusiness Development Corporation (ADC). The Working Group is to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State. An interim report is due to the 2025 Legislature and the final report to the 2026 Legislature. There is no appropriation. The 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 real demand for farm workers. This information would inform a targeted rather than broad assessment of agricultural workforce housing needs. For instance, in 2017, 62 percent of Hawaii's 7,328 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 to build and operate on-farm worker housing. A possible solution may benefit from aggregated living quarters located somewhere close to where these farm operations are aggregated.

The Department believes that an appropriation(s) is necessary to undertake data and information gathering, survey farm operators, administer to the needs of the Working Group, and hire consultants with the expertise in addressing agricultural workforce housing needs.

The Department respectfully requests funding for the Royal Kunia Agricultural Park CIP project that provides 24 farm lots with housing as a proof-of-concept to address agricultural workforce housing needs statewide. This project will enhance the tasks of the Working Group and the information gathering.

Thank you for the opportunity to present our testimony.

SB-2961

Submitted on: 2/5/2024 3:47:33 PM

Testimony for AEN on 2/7/2024 1:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Colehour Bondera | Testifying for Kanalani Ohana Farm | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members:

Please accept this as support for SB2961.

Housing for workers is a vital issue that many farms need at the make or break level.

This is my long-term experience as a small-scale farmer in Kona.

Thank you for your consideration and support of this important piece of legislation.

Sincerely,

Colehour Bondera

KANALANI OHANA FARM

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February 7, 2024

HEARING BEFORE THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT

TESTIMONY ON HB 2961
RELATING TO AGRICULTURAL WORKFORCE HOUSING

Conference Room 224 & Videoconference
1:00 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 2961, which requires the Department of Agriculture to establish an Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group to address the shortage and challenges of agricultural workforce housing in the State.

HFB recognizes the need for agricultural workforce housing and believes that affordable housing is necessary to attract farm workers. This has been a major shortfall as we try to address the labor needs for agriculture and is a limiting factor for the growth of agriculture in Hawai'i.

The shortage of willing and able workers, affordable housing for farm workers, and competition from alternative employment are several of the pressing farm-labor-related issues that need to be addressed.

The lack of affordable housing for farmers and farm labor impedes increasing food and non-food agricultural production in Hawai'i. There is a need to develop housing for farmers and farm employees while ensuring that the housing is used in conjunction with an active farm and occupied by bona fide farmers and farm employees.

An Agricultural Workforce Housing Working Group can help identify the agricultural workforce housing needs in each County and help identify the barriers to meeting the housing needs for farm and ranch businesses in Hawai'i.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of this measure.