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and
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House Committee on Housing
Oregon Farm Bureau Testimony on HB 2708
February 9, 2021

Chair Fahey, Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on HB 2708. By way of background, the Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) is the state's largest agricultural trade association, representing nearly 7,000 farm and ranch families in the state. While OFB appreciates the legislature's efforts in addressing affordable housing, OFB has concerns about the potential conversion of important agricultural lands that might result from HB 2708.

In general, OFB supports the use of Urban Growth Boundaries (UGB) as a means of dividing agriculture land from urban land, designating land within UGBs to provide space for all urban needs, such as housing, as well as managing the growth of a city in such a way that needs and services can be efficiently provided. However, any boundary expansion on land protected under Goal 3 must not impair the infrastructure needed to produce food and fiber for current and future generations.

With this in mind, OFB recognizes that HB 2708 attempts to condition an expansion area by mandating that it must be compact, contiguous, adjacent to an existing urban growth boundary, and not larger than 50 acres, as well as in the vicinity of public facilities and services, and not on high-value farmland. We believe that these restrictions are a step in the right direction on protecting agricultural lands, but unfortunately, do not go far enough. There are many highly important agricultural lands that do not meet the definition of high-value farmland under ORS 195.300, that are necessary to support the agricultural community in certain regions, such as important irrigated, grazing, or viticulture lands.

Moreover, this bill supersedes the efforts of HB 4079, which passed in 2016. HB 4079 created a pilot program aimed at helping cities build affordable housing. The purpose of the pilot program was to allow a path forward for cities to address affordable housing, while still giving the state an opportunity to evaluate what lessons could be learned for future affordable housing efforts. The legislature should wait to evaluate the lessons learned and success of HB 4079 before looking to create a statewide program. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and please do not hesitate to contact us with any further questions.

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