



February 23, 2023

To: House Committee on Housing and Homelessness

From: Peter Hainley, CASA of Oregon

Re: HB 2001 -11 Amendment Section 67 **Agricultural Workforce Housing Grants**

Chair Dexter, Vice Chairs Helfrich and Gamba, and members of the committee,

My name is Peter Hainley. I am the executive director of CASA of Oregon. CASA is a statewide nonprofit community development corporation that has been working with local communities to create housing, facilities and asset building opportunities for 35 years. Our Manufactured Housing Cooperative Development Center, Multi family Real Estate Development dept , Individual Development Account and Community Loan Fund programs all provide Oregonians Our origins are rooted in providing housing for farmworkers both on-farm and in a community-based setting. To date, we have completed housing supporting more than 5000 farmworkers and their families. We helped growers with the renovation or creation of housing with more than 1000 bed spaces. We are supportive of efforts to improve on-farm housing.

While we are supportive of providing additional safe, decent and affordable housing for farmworkers living in housing provided by their employer, we want to make sure that all investments in farmworker housing are equitable and that state resources come with appropriate compliance requirements to protect residents and the state's investments.

### **Existing funding for farmworker housing**

There are currently existing housing funding sources available to farmers via the Oregon Housing and Community Services' administered Agricultural Workforce Housing Tax Credit (AWHTC) program. For thirty years, this funding source has supported the development of both community-based and on-farm housing. While some in the agriculture community have been very successful in utilizing the program, it has been reported that the program doesn't work for others. A common complaint is that farmers don't have a tax liability in which to offset the tax credit. This shouldn't be a concern as the tax credit is transferable and housing providers can transfer the credit to someone who does have a liability. This is exactly what developers of community based farmworker housing have been doing since the inception of the tax credit program.

We would like to make sure that this successful resource can be utilized by growers. We encourage the various state agencies involved in the administration of the AWHTC to work with stakeholders to determine how this resource can be better utilized by all growers.

## **ODA vs OHCS**

-11 suggests that the program be administered by Oregon Department of Agriculture. While we understand the growers familiarity with ODA, the AWHTC is currently administered by OHCS. We have a concern that an agency that does not currently administer any shelter programs would be required to establish one. We believe that the appropriate agency to administer these funds is OHCS as they already have established programs for funding housing.

As a developer of community-based farmworker housing, we currently have standards of construction set by OHCS. We are also required to comply with all local zoning and building code regulations to meet life, health and safety concerns. We enter into regulatory agreements with OHCS that mandate ongoing compliance to ensure state investments are protected in the long run. Investments in on-farm housing should also have ongoing compliance requirements similar to other housing in which the state invests its resources.

If the legislature insists on the funding be administered by ODA, we would like to request that a voice for the farmworker housing community be assured a position on the ODA Board or that a commission be established that represents the rights of the agricultural workers. In this way, we can be assured that community voices familiar with farmworkers and their housing struggles will be at the table.

We would like to see additional posting requirements so residents understand their rights. We would like to see trusted community organizations be the first point of contact if a farmworker has questions or complaints regarding their on-farm housing situation. Given the legal status of many farmworkers, they are usually reluctant to engage with state officials.

Lastly, if you live in on-farm housing and lose your job, you usually lose your housing

## **OSHA**

OSHA is currently updating their rules that govern the standards for on-farm housing. We recognize that this funding can be an incentive for providers of this housing to improve their housing beyond the minimum standards established by OSHA. We believe that state investments in housing should go well above and beyond OSHA standards which are minimum habitability standards.

We are neutral on the Agricultural Workforce Housing Grant section included in the -11 amendment as currently written. We believe with the addition of appropriate protections for farmworkers, protections for state investments, ensure that investments go beyond minimum habitability standards and administration of the funds by OHCS, CASA could support this investment in on-farm housing.

Thank you.