



Farmworker Housing Development Corporation

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“A Home Is Just the Beginning”

March 28, 2023

To: House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
From: Carmen Fernandez, Housing Development Manager, Farmworker Housing Development Corp.
Re: HB 3555-1 Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing Development
Chair Dexter, Vice Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and members of the Committee

My name is Carmen Fernandez, I am the Housing Development Manager of Farmworker Housing Development Corporation. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of HB 3555 with the -1 amendment. HB 3555 makes a critical targeted investment for the development and pre-development of agricultural workforce housing.

For more than 30 years, FHDC has been developing farmworker leadership for stronger and more secure families and communities through affordable housing, social services, education, and economic development. Since 1990, FHDC has been transforming Low-Income, Farmworker, and immigrant communities in rural and urban areas of the Mid-Willamette Valley by developing community-based housing.

We have developed and own 12 properties, in 7 different communities with 480 units, serving over 1,500 total residents. The demographics of our communities are made up of more than 50% youth, ages 0-18, 85% LatinX, the average age of 24, an average income of \$28,000 for a family of 5, and more than 85% of our youths graduate high school.

Holistic community-based housing makes a real and long-lasting impact in farmworkers' lives and their families. Families living in our housing often reach out for more resources and information as many have limited education backgrounds to support or provide their children with tutors/counseling that many times exceed their limited budget.

At FHDC, our goal is not only to open the doors for our residents but to provide support to assist them with reaching their personal goals and their goals for their families. We provide all programs and services in our communities bi-lingually in Spanish and English. Our community and housing support systems include Asset Building workshops for first-time home buyers, IDAs, and Financial Literacy; Education – we provide after-school activities to more than 300 children throughout the year; we also provide ESL and computer classes for adults and nutrition and health classes for the entire family. Several times a year we provide on-site access to healthcare services, including dental vans and mental health services; Workforce Development – offering training, internships, and job placement; and food security working with local food banks and using our own community gardens, we provide families with access to healthy foods.

I want to take this opportunity to share a success story. When Margarita was 6 years old, her family moved to FHDC's Colonia Libertad, an affordable housing community in Salem, Oregon. She participated in many programs from music to after-school tutoring, among others. As Margarita aged out of the various programs offered, she returned to assist the Resident Services team as a volunteer, tutoring elementary school grade students in Spanish for school subjects of reading, writing, speaking, and math. She received a scholarship from Portland State University through the 4-Years Free Program and amid the pandemic, she managed to complete her Bachelor of Arts degree with a focus in Architecture from PSU. Margarita is now eager to continue to help the community she grew up in with her new role as Junior Housing Specialist for FHDC's housing development department. I consider it my honor and pleasure to work with Margarita and continue to assist her on her path of growth as a community leader. Margarita and many others like her are shining examples of the work we do in our communities and why we are urging you to **support HB 3555-1 and create a targeted funding investment for farmworker housing in our state.**