Testimony Opposing SB 1578, 2026
Senate Committee on Housing and Development

SB 1578 applies to counties with **fewer than 30 people per square mile**, and **19 of Oregon's 36 counties meet that threshold**. Each of those counties may rezone **up to 50 acres** of land currently protected under Goal 3 (Agricultural Lands) or Goal 4 (Forest Lands) for residential development outside any UGB. In total, that is **950 acres of protected resource land** that could be converted to residential use under this single bill.

SB 1578 requires a **minimum** of five units per acre but sets **no maximum density**. Because each unit may be up to 1,200 square feet, the bill allows far denser forms of development than the public has been led to believe. Nothing in the text prohibits **multi-story walk-ups**, **stacked flats**, **garden-style apartment complexes**, or **mid-rise buildings** on protected farm and forest land. There are **no limits** on building height, **no maximum number of buildings per acre**, no cap on impervious surface, and no guardrails on overall scale. If a developer can fit 10, 20, 40, or more units per acre, the bill allows it. This is urban-level development placed on resource land.

Oregon created its land-use system to prevent exactly this outcome. **Goal 3** protects farmland in large, contiguous blocks so agriculture remains viable, affordable, and shielded from incompatible development. **Goal 4** protects forestland for timber production, watershed health, wildlife habitat, and long-term ecological integrity. These goals exist to keep residential encroachment, fragmentation, and speculative pressure off resource lands.

SB 1578 overrides these protections explicitly. By stating that it applies "notwithstanding any land use planning goal related to urbanization or agricultural or forest land," the bill suspends the core safeguards that have anchored Oregon's land-use covenant for fifty years. It allows counties to treat protected farm and forest land as if it were urban land, without the planning, infrastructure, environmental review, or cumulative-impact analysis that urban development requires.

The bill includes a sunset clause, but the development it authorizes does **not** sunset. Once farmland or forestland is rezoned and built on, the loss is permanent. The fragmentation remains. The precedent remains. A temporary authorization produces irreversible consequences.

Oregon's protected farm and forest lands are not a renewable resource. Once they are rezoned, divided, and built upon, we do not get them back. The landscapes Oregonians have treasured for generations—continuous working farms, intact forest blocks, open rural

horizons—are changed in ways that cannot be undone. SB 1578 invites a pattern of incremental loss that accumulates over time, each “small” exception weakening the integrity of the whole. The result is a steady erosion of the very resource lands Oregon’s land-use system was created to safeguard.

Please do not move this bill forward. If these protections fall away, even in small increments, we will lose more than land. We will lose the reverence that has shaped how Oregonians have understood themselves in relation to place—the deep, steady knowing that some lands are meant to be carefully held, tended with an awareness of their long horizon. It is this relationship, formed by the land, the light, the water, and the culture of the Pacific Northwest, that has given this region its unmistakable identity. When that slips, the extraordinary natural beauty and the values it carried begin to fade, not all at once, but irrevocably, until we no longer remember what has made Oregon and the Pacific Northwest a place apart.