



February 12, 2026

To: Chair Broadman and Senate Committee on Finance and Revenue

RE: Opposition to SB 1586

On behalf of the East Multnomah Soil and Water Conservation District (EMSWCD), I am writing to express our deep concern for SB 1586, a legislative bill that would turn 1,700 acres of farmland in Rural Reserve to industrial development by bypassing our land use system.

EMSWCD is a regional government organization that serves the people, land and water of East Multnomah County. Our mission is to help people care for land and water. We do this by restoring streams and rivers in East Multnomah County, building onramps for new farm businesses and by protecting farmland from fragmentation and conversion. While SB 1586 is focused on land in Washington County, we are deeply concerned about the precedent it sets by siting industrial development in a Rural Reserve and circumventing our statewide land use planning system.

SB 1586 is precedent-setting

Passage of SB 1586 would set a dangerous precedent by creating legislative pathways around our land use system. East Multnomah County benefits greatly from a united and systematic land use system designed to protect our best agricultural land, forest land, open space and natural resources. It provides a pathway for smart growth and economic development by evaluating Urban Growth Boundaries every 10 years and establishing Urban Reserves to receive future growth and Rural Reserves to protect the high-value agricultural lands that sustain us. This system allows economic development to go hand-in-hand with environmental protection through a rigorous and public process. **Passage of SB 1586 sends the signal that there is a short-cut around our land use system for special interests, individual communities or elected officials that wish to advance specific projects.** The bill requires Washington County and the city of Hillsboro to amend their respective comprehensive plans to change 1,700 acres from Rural Reserve to land planned and zoned for industrial use such as high-technology, commercial use, and manufacturing (pg. 15 of SB 1586). This “legislative super siting” undermines urban and rural reserves- the very backbone of our land use system.

Even if the bill is amended to include a smaller acreage, there has been no demonstration that this land is needed for industrial development, or analysis of the impacts on farmland, natural resources, and other public values.

Farmland protection IS economic development

A core focus of EMSWCD is the protection of high-value agricultural land that serves as the cornerstone of our rural area and rural economy. These lands provide domestic food security, support thriving farm and nursery businesses, and habitat for fish and wildlife. Despite our current land use system, Multnomah County continues to experience farmland loss and an erosion of the local agricultural economy, farm services and farm infrastructure. Multnomah County's land in *exclusive farm use* (EFU) dropped from 36,503 acres in 1997 to 27,983 acres in 2022. That's a net loss of 8,520 acres over 25 years — about 77% of the farmland acreage remains in farm use.

To halt the loss of agricultural operations, EMSWCD launched a working farmland protection program in 2013. The goal of the program is to “strategically and permanently protect high value agricultural lands in order to maintain a viable agricultural economy and improve watershed health and function.” EMSWCD's program works in partnership with private landowners to create ‘Forever Farms’ by purchasing working farmland easements to ensure that land continues in active agricultural use. We also work with new farmers to open doors to land access for communities that are historically marginalized in Oregon's farming sector, including black, Indigenous, farmers of color and refugees. **This emerging community of BIPOC farmers and farm businesses in the Willamette Valley relies on available and affordable land. With every agricultural parcel taken out of production, land becomes more expensive and less accessible.** By preventing conversion to non-farm uses, we can continue to ensure access to affordable agricultural land so farm businesses can thrive.

Public Process

These land use decisions normally have extensive information showing how the land is needed and how infrastructure on the properties will be provided. They have multiple public hearings where officials making the decisions must disclose all ex parte communications. In the case of SB 1586, there have been no similar public process. We only see a 6-page prospectus on the details of the project. There have been no local public meetings, and this hearing was scheduled before amendments were posted. This process contravenes the public role in deciding how their communities are shaped.

Conclusion

EMSWCD is dedicated to protecting soil and water health, taking climate action, and advancing equity. We work side by side with our regional partners like Metro to protect public assets like clean water, healthy soil, and available farmland. We are deeply concerned about the precedent set by SB 1586 and the signal it sends that favors industrial development opportunities over

farmland protection. We ask you to stand up for our regional planning system and oppose SB 1586.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kelley Beamer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kelley Beamer, Executive Director