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Oregon State Legislature
Senate Committee on Finance & Revenue

RE: SB 1586 - Oppose

Dear Chair Broadman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 1586. Central Oregon LandWatch (“LandWatch”) is a land use and conservation advocacy organization that, for 40 years, has protected Central Oregon’s farm and forest lands, rivers and springs, fish and wildlife, and vibrant communities. We work to balance conservation of the region’s ecosystems, wildlife habitat, and working rural lands with a responsible approach to planning and developing thriving communities.

LandWatch stands in strong opposition to SB 1586 and amendments that would expand the Hillsboro UGB. This bill would eliminate rural reserve protections for 1,700 acres of the finest agricultural land found anywhere in the world. These protections were put in place in 2014 and the intent was for the land to remain in farm production until at least 2065. Now, SB 1586 proposes to eliminate rural reserve protections in favor of allowing industrial development, likely in the form of AI-related data centers.

The negative effects of SB 1586 on farmland and the statewide land use planning system will be significant and far-reaching. Locally, Washington County’s agricultural sector risks being crippled and fractured by this expansion. SB 1586 will make it harder for surrounding farmers to travel between fields that will become separated by industrial development. Producer processing facilities and other businesses that provide goods and services to the farm operators on the 1,700 acres will also suffer, as their customer-base is eroded. And of course, farmland cannot be replaced once it is paved over.

More broadly, SB 1586 represents a continuation of the Legislature’s troubling inclination to pick winners and losers. Currently, the state has more than 10,000 acres of vacant, unbuilt industrial land within urban growth boundaries, including several hundred in the City of Hillsboro. Allowing the conversion of farmland to the benefit of select landowners and businesses is likely to encourage further speculative land-holding and drive up the price of farmland, including here in Central Oregon.

For these reasons and more, LandWatch urges the members of the committee to reject this effort to sell out Washington County farmland, unfairly pick development winners and losers, and break the state’s promise in the 2014 “Grand Bargain” to protect this land from industrial and urban development.

Sincerely,

Robin Hayakawa
Associate Staff Attorney



We defend and plan for Central Oregon's livable future