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Testimony Regarding HB 2610A Before the Senate Finance and Revenue Committee April 2nd, 2015

Chair Hass, Vice-Chair Boquist, and members of the Committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I submit this testimony in support of HB 2610A, which will make technical changes necessary to allow the farmworker housing tax exemption program to achieve its long-standing purpose of facilitating the development of safe, stable, affordable housing for our state's agricultural workers and their families.

The Oregon Law Center (OLC) is a statewide non-profit law firm whose mission is to provide access to justice for the low income communities of Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. A large number of our clients are low-wage workers, some of whom have jobs on farms or processing and handling crops in rural areas around the state. Farmworkers and other agricultural workers are amongst our most vulnerable populations, struggling to make ends meet and feed their families while they are working hard to make food available for others' tables. The availability of safe and affordable housing for farmworker and agricultural worker families is crucial not only to their livelihood, but to strengthen and maintain a strong economy locally and regionally.

Over the years, the farmworker housing property tax exemption has facilitated the building of many units of affordable housing. HB 2610A makes simple technical changes to the program to make it consistent with the current best-practice model of community-based agricultural workforce housing. Previously, when the majority of such housing was constructed on farms instead of in communities, OR-OSHA and the fire-marshal had jurisdiction over the applicable safety and health regulations. Now that such housing is built in communities and is not tied specifically to one employer, OR-OSHA does not have jurisdiction, and community-based building codes and permits are the mechanism to regulate health, fire, and safety standards. The technical amendments in HB 2610A will make the requirements of the program consistent with practical realities of community-based agricultural workforce housing, and will facilitate development of this resource for Oregon's families and communities.

Oregon's model of community-based farmworker housing has been nationally recognized as achieving excellent results through collaboration between developers, communities, advocates, health care providers, and employers. We respectfully urge your support for HB 2610A to support Oregon's agricultural economy, employers, workers and their families. I thank the committee for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this program.