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House Committee on Housing and Homelessness
Testimony in support HB 3555-1
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Chair Dexter, Vice-chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Oregon Law Center (OLC), I writing to express my strong support for HB 3555-1, which makes a critical investment in community-based housing for agricultural workers and their families.

OLC is a statewide non-profit organization that provides free legal help to people struggling to make ends meet. Our mission is to achieve justice for low-income communities in Oregon by providing a full range of the highest quality civil legal services. We advocate for our clients and for the services and programs that help them overcome poverty.

One of the low-income communities we serve is the migrant and seasonal farmworker population. Farmworkers in our state are a critical workforce and contribute in immense ways to our robust agricultural industry, and the vibrancy of our state. However, farmworkers and their families encounter unique challenges that make it extremely difficult to achieve economic security, stability, and prosperity. They earn low wages, oftentimes have limited or no access to healthcare, encounter language barriers in accessing resources and programs, among other challenges. Farmworkers, who are mostly Latinx, were some of the hardest hit workers in the pandemic with high infection rates. The current housing instability and skyrocketing cost of living are driving many, especially farm workers and their families, to make hard choices.

That's why we are particularly excited to see this bill come forward, which aims to reduce housing instability among our farmworker population by making an important investment in community-based housing for farmworkers. There are many examples of community-based housing for farmworkers and the deep impact it has made on their lives. Ensuring that our farmworkers can access to quality, affordable, and healthy housing, and critical services, is all around beneficial to our communities. Unfortunately, the need is great and an investment like this, leveraged with other funding sources, can go a long way in making possible the development of more community-based housing.

HB 3555 was brought forward with a multi-pronged approach to supporting greater access to safe, stable, and affordable housing for farmworkers across the state. The bill proposed a \$5 million investment in the Agricultural Repair Fund for improvements to pre-existing on-farm housing, and a \$20 million investment in development/pre-development of new units of year-round community-based housing.

With passage of HB 2001, the legislature has already accomplished the \$5 million investment in the Agricultural Repair Fund. The -1 amendment therefore removes that portion of the base bill, by deleting sections one and two.

The rest of the bill only pertains to the community-based agricultural housing grant. Other details of the amendment are as follows:

- A \$20 million investment towards the development/pre-development of community-based housing for farmworkers through a grant program administered by Oregon Housing and Community Services (OHCS).
- A 60-year affordability period, to be consistent with the affordability provisions applicable to other forms of affordable housing.
- Prioritization of funding to nonprofit housing corporations that serve agricultural workers, or partnerships with housing nonprofits that serve agricultural workers. It also encourages leveraging this grant with other funding sources (which is almost always the case), development of housing close to significant agricultural employment or be near specific characteristics or amenities that support or attract agricultural workers and their families.
- Adds the following housing types as eligible for development/predevelopment of agricultural workforce housing: prefabricated and modular housing, housing produced through a three-dimensional printing process, or other housing developed using innovative construction types.
- Housing must be within 20 miles of significant agricultural employment.

Safe and healthy housing is vital to building thriving and resilient communities. We strongly urge this committee's support for HB 3555-1 to invest in healthy and safe housing for farmworkers and their families.