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Senate Committee on Housing and Development

Dear Chair Pham, Vice-Chair Anderson and Members of the Committee:

My name is Diana Wirth, and I serve as President of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association. I am writing today in support of **SB 1578**, a bill that provides meaningful, practical tools for rural counties and the families who live and work on Oregon's working lands.

Ranching families are deeply tied to the landscapes where we raise cattle, steward natural resources, and contribute to the economic and cultural fabric of rural Oregon. But the challenges facing these communities are growing: workforce shortages, limited housing options, aging infrastructure, and the ongoing struggle to keep the next generation rooted in the places where they were raised. SB 1578 helps address these challenges in a way that respects both land-use protections and the realities of rural life.

SB 1578 allows rural counties with low population density to rezone up to 50 acres for modest-sized homes, with clear limits to ensure development is compact, affordable, and compatible with surrounding farm and ranch operations.

For ranching families, this matters. Many of our operations span generations, and we rely on family members, ranch hands, and young producers who need attainable housing close to where the work happens. When housing is scarce or unaffordable, it becomes harder to hire help, harder to keep kids on the ranch, and harder to sustain the rural workforce that agriculture depends on.

By allowing counties to create small clusters of workforce-appropriate housing — not vacation rentals, not luxury homes — SB 1578 gives rural communities a tool they have long needed.

The bill also expands rural ADU options, including allowing larger ADUs and enabling historic homes to be converted into ADUs when a new primary dwelling is built.

For ranching families, ADUs are not a luxury. They are a lifeline:

- A place for aging parents to stay close while remaining independent.
- A home for a returning son or daughter who want to take on more responsibility in the operation.
- Housing for a trusted ranch employee who needs to live on-site.

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These small, practical housing options strengthen family continuity and support the long-term viability of ranch operations.

SB 1578 requires deed restrictions acknowledging the protected rights of farm, forest, and rangeland practices. This is essential. It ensures that new residents understand and accept the realities of working lands — from early-morning cattle work to dust, noise, and seasonal operations — and prevents future conflicts that too often burden producers.

This is smart policy: it expands rural housing while safeguarding the very practices that make rural Oregon productive. SB 1578 does not undermine Oregon's land-use system. It works within it — offering narrow, targeted flexibility to counties that need it most. It supports:

- Rural workforce stability
- Family succession planning
- Housing affordability
- Protection of agricultural operations
- Responsible, small-scale development

For ranchers, these are not abstract policy goals. They are day-to-day realities that determine whether an operation can survive into the next generation.

In closing and on behalf of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, I respectfully urge your support for SB 1578. This bill gives rural counties the tools they need to keep their communities strong, support working-lands families, and ensure that Oregon's ranching heritage remains viable for decades to come.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to rural Oregon.

Respectfully submitted,

Diana Wirth, Oregon Cattlemen's Association President