

MAXINE E. DEXTER, MD

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DISTRICT 33



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

To: Members of the House Committee on Housing and Homelessness

Date: March 28, 2023

Subject: Support HB 3555

Vice Chairs Helfrich and Gamba and members of the committee:

For the record, my name is Dr. Maxine Dexter and I am honored to be the State Representative for House District 33, which includes NW & Downtown Portland, Linnton, and Cathedral Park. I am grateful for this opportunity today to present to you HB 3555, establishing funding for the development of community-based housing for our agricultural workforce.

Agricultural communities are historically underserved in their needs for safe and affordable housing. Many of the options available to agricultural workers do not meet the social and economic needs of the workers and their families. Employer-owned, on-farm housing, which has traditionally been provided as a condition of employment, provided shelter to this workforce which in the early 2000s was a 50% migrant farmworker population. It is now well documented that around 84% of agricultural workers are long-term residents in their communities - they are raising families and building sustaining social networks. The conditions of on-farm housing are often substandard and can lead to isolation for individuals and families from their broader community. Many agricultural workers are living with or supporting families, and these on-farm options do not provide the resources that are important to the wellbeing of the workers and their families (Farmworker Justice, 2015). Additionally, a significant proportion of the agricultural workforce consists of immigrant or undocumented workers, who face increased risks of labor and housing exploitation (Farmworker Justice, 2015).

As this committee knows, HB 2001B allocated \$5M to a repair grant fund to help bring on-farm housing across Oregon up to OR-OSHA health and safety standards. The need for this fund and immediate upgrades to current housing was highlighted by Governor Brown's Interagency Task Force on Agricultural Labor Housing, which met in June through October of 2022 (DCBS, 2022 and [Agricultural housing task force submits memo to Gov. Brown \(statesmanjournal.com\)](#)). These are necessary steps to establishing safe and affordable housing for these communities and is an investment I am hopeful will be put to immediate good use.

HB 3555 takes an alternative approach, focusing on community-based housing as a means for establishing not just healthy and safe housing options for agricultural workers, but also allowing

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for housing that is not provided by one employer as a condition of employment, but supported by the entire community. Increasingly, workers are remaining in tight geographic regions, creating necessary cultural and social networks (Farmworker Justice, 2015) and raising families.

Facilitating state investments in community-based housing is an essential part of our work to serve this population and maintain a stable agricultural workforce. As such, HB 3555 will provide \$20,000,000 in funding for non-profits who develop community-based housing for agricultural workers, with requirements for it to be located within 20 miles of significant agricultural employment, and to have maintained affordability. These grants will help foster the development of housing options that leverage the ability of this historically marginalized population to establish healthy, resilient residential communities that maximize opportunities for workers and their families to have more access to services such as education, transportation and childcare.

I urge you to support this bill as an opportunity to care for both our farmers and our agricultural workers as it is clear that we all will benefit when this skilled workforce has access to safe and affordable housing as well as community-based services that help them thrive in every part of our state.

Thank you for your time and consideration today, and I urge your support for HB 3555.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maxine Dexter".

Representative Maxine Dexter, M.D.

House District 33 (NW Portland and NE Washington County)

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