



March 28, 2023

To: House Committee on Housing and Homelessness

From: Nathan Teske, Executive Director, Bienestar

Re: HB 3555 Relating to Agricultural Workforce Housing Development

Chair Dexter, Vice Chairs Gamba and Helfrich, and members of the committee,

My name is Nathan Teske, I am the Executive Director of Bienestar. I am speaking today in favor of HB 3555 with Dash 1 amendment. Bienestar is a 42-year-old community based housing developer with its heart and history in the Latinx community of Washington and Columbia Counties. We are building or own and operate 14 multi-family affordable housing properties that will have over 770 units by early 2024. Our history began in Forest Grove with a property developed to address the horrible, and often inhumane, housing that migrant and seasonal farmworkers endured.

We provide all programs and services for our farmworker residents bi-lingually in Spanish and English and have served farm worker families throughout the pandemic via the education and outreach in our “Salva Vidas/Se Fuerte” (Save Lives/Be Strong) campaign, through direct assistance Oregon Workers Relief Fund and Bienestar’s private fund, the Esperanza Fund, and now are sub-grantees of the United Farm Workers Foundation’s effort to distribute assistance via the Food and Farm Worker Relief program of USDA.

We see daily the need for safe, stable and affordable housing for farm workers and their families in the areas we serve. Washington County’s most recent HUD Consolidated Plan, “A Road Home,” estimates the need for over 13,000 units of affordable housing to meet the current demand, and many hundreds of those units are needed for farmworker families.

Median rents for families in Forest Grove, Hillsboro, Aloha and other areas Bienestar serves are simply unaffordable for farm worker families that perform work that is often literally back-breaking and that exposes them to heat, cold, wildfire smoke and the elements. During the pandemic we have seen families become literally homeless but continue to go to work every day. And it is not surprising when family-sized units, with 3 or more bedrooms, rent for \$2,500 or more in the communities Bienestar serves. Indeed, the regular tools used for financing affordable housing development, which incentivize development of smaller studio and one bedroom units, often do not meet the needs of farm worker families, which are often multi-generational immigrant households that serve as an anchor for large families.

I urge you to support HB 3555-1 and create a dedicated funding source for farm worker housing in our state.

Bienestar builds housing, hope, and community for the wellbeing of Latinxs, immigrants, and all families in need