

VINELANDERS COMMUNITY LAND TRUST

What is "Workforce Housing"?

As one observer put it, "housing is where the jobs go home to sleep at night." Workforce housing is housing for the occupations needed in every community, including teachers, nurses, police officers, fire fighters and many other critical workers. In many communities, there is a mismatch between where these jobs are located and where affordable homes are located – a difficult situation for both working households and employers. Many working families must choose between paying exorbitant housing costs to live close to their jobs or enduring lengthy commutes from areas with more affordable housing. In areas with particularly high housing costs, employers may have difficulty retaining employees because the workers do not make enough to afford nearby homes and tire of long commutes.

Workforce housing also is an issue of equity. People who provide the bulk of essential services in their communities – teachers, police officers, fire fighters, hospital workers, laundry and restaurant workers – often cannot afford to live in the communities they serve. The lack of affordable workforce housing is felt beyond working families, however. High housing costs force families to move further and further from their place of work to afford housing. Cities become ever more sprawling, leading to increases in traffic congestion, air pollution, and road maintenance costs that negatively affect the quality of life for all residents in the community.

The families in need of workforce housing do not fall neatly into a single narrow income category. Employees in some industries (e.g. retail sales, food service, tourism) are likely to be in the lower income ranges. Seasoned workforce jobs with education or training requirements, such as teachers, police officers, nurses, etc., may fall into the middle income brackets but still find it difficult to afford homes in the community where they work.

To address these issues, a growing number of employers, states and localities are developing "workforce housing" programs to bring housing within reach of working families.

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