



PO Box 1612
Lawrence KS 66044
785-312-7200
info@kansasriver.org
kansasriver.org

**866 RIVKEEP to
REPORT POLLUTION**

**Kansas Riverkeeper® and
Executive Director**
Dawn Buehler

Program Manager
Kim Mahanna-Bellemere

Education Coordinator
Denise Kidder

Board of Directors
Sarah Morse, President
Rob Sheffield, Vice President
Renee Whaley, Secretary
Mike Scherrer, Treasurer

Members
Amy Burgin
Mike Butler
Mark Dugan
Margaret Fast
Lisa Grossman
Sarah Hill-Nelson
Heidi Mehl
Marcia Rozell

February 15, 2022

House Water Committee
Kansas State Capitol
300 SW 10th Street
Topeka, KS 66612

Re: Testimony to the House Water Committee for the Hearing on
House Bill 2686

To whom it may concern:

Thank you Chair, Vice Chair and Ranking Member for the opportunity to present testimony to the House Water Committee for the Hearing on House Bill 2686, an act concerning creating a new executive branch agency, the Kansas Department of Water and Environment (KDWE) as well as other water-related changes.

I represent the Friends of the Kaw, a 501(c)(3), grassroots, conservation organization dedicated to protecting the Kansas River. Our organization provides educational programming about the Kansas River ecosystem, advocates for conservation practices to maintain a healthy river, and works with communities to develop and promote the Kansas River Water Trail.

- We strongly support passage of HB2686. Water quality and quantity issues across the state need the attention of a cabinet-level agency. This is a long overdue reorganization for the responsibility and accountability for water in Kansas.
- We strongly request that the public input for water planning be maintained with the Regional Advisory Committees and Kansas Water Authority (KWA). It is important to have a broad base of constituents who understand the issues in their own communities and water sectors to provide guidance on water across the state. These public volunteers bring the local issues to the state-level planning process, and public participation should remain an important part of the water planning process. Just being in the same agency doesn't mean coordination would happen.



Protect. Advocate. Discover.



An advisory like the Kansas Water Authority allows not only for public input, but also the opportunity for the various divisions and other resource agencies like Kansas Geological Survey, Kansas Biological Survey, and K-State Extension to provide meaningful input and support. The entire bill emphasizes the importance of public input and agency coordination. Every division has their processes in place now, but this bill could provide an avenue for meaningful synergies into the future for a better coordinated water effort and transparent public process.

- We strongly urge the House Water Committee to increase the state's portion of the State Water Plan Fund to a match dollar for dollar with the fees for the fund. The statutory demand transfer of \$6 million from the general fund and \$2 million from the economic development initiatives fund have not only been under funded by \$84.6 million in the last 15 years, these funds also have not been increased since the inception of the fund statute from 1989. Due to inflation and the need for sorely underfunded water projects across the state, we ask that the Committee consider a state statutory increase to match the fees generated from public and interest groups across the state. Strengthening the State Water Plan Fund is critical to continued protection and management of the water resources of the state. The imposition of reasonable fees and state matching support will help generate the amount of funding needed to support the state's water resource goals.
- We urge the committee to *not* use this opportunity to reduce labor or revenue for water initiatives. As these agencies are consolidated under this bill, we ask that budgets for the agencies follow them into the new Kansas Department of Water and Environment. The agencies are under staffed as it is, so we urge you to maintain current funding levels.
- We recommend that the Committee consider adding a balance of political parties as a criterion for appointments to the Water & Environment Maintenance Board. This will ensure bipartisan support for funding water resources. Water is a basic human right for every person in Kansas, regardless of party affiliation. We urge you to consider ways to maintain a structure where water is non-partisan. We also recommend that the Director of each division be permanent employees rather than political appointees.





- We recommend clarifying some language with the Water & Environment Maintenance Board. The Water & Environmental Maintenance Board will have to be carefully managed to separate the responsibilities of the Kansas Water Authority and the Water & Environmental Maintenance Board. Having the direct legislative and financial input to expenditures makes sense. The Kansas Water Authority will be making recommendations for the State Water Plan fund sub account so some overlap or conflict could occur.

We respectfully request that you support House Bill 2686. We appreciate the thoughtful and hard work that has been put into this bill. The Committee has taken the time to learn about the many facets of water in Kansas to offer a better path forward. This bill is a good bill, obviously drafted in a bi-partisan effort to seek fairness. This is an opportunity of a generation to make meaningful changes that will prepare our state for the future. Water is critical to Kansas and to our people. We urge you to support House Bill 2686.

We owe it to the next generations to continue to make improvements. Change is hard, and we know that there will be testimony from folks that do not want change. But if we don't change, we don't grow. Kansas is growing and with it, we need to prepare for the water resources of the future. Thank you for your service to this Legislature, and to the State of Kansas.

Sincerely,
FRIENDS OF THE KAW,

Mark Dugan

Mark Dugan, JD
Board of Directors

Sarah Morse

Sarah Morse, JD
President, Board of Directors

Dawn Buehler

Dawn Buehler
Kansas Riverkeeper® & Executive Director



Protect. Advocate. Discover.