



Proponent Testimony Provided to the
House Water Committee
February 16, 2022

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In Support of House Bill 2686

Good morning Mr. Chairman, Mr. Vice Chairman, and Ranking Member. The Kansas Municipal Utilities is pleased to offer this testimony in support of HB 2686.

Kansas Municipal Utilities (KMU) are the more than 180 municipally owned electric, gas, water and wastewater systems in Kansas. We include electric service to communities as small as Argonia, with less than 100 meters, and water service to the state's largest city, Wichita. KMU is the state's oldest utility association, formed in 1929.

Cities have always been at the forefront of public water supplies in Kansas, and know how hard it is to ensure that water is available for their citizens. Perhaps nowhere is this more apparent than Greensburg, Kansas (a KMU member) and home of the "Big Well", which was originally built for the Rock Island and Santa Fe railroads but also served the community of Greensburg upon its completion in 1888. Municipal efforts to provide water to their citizens existed long before most of the water laws in Kansas.

KMU has watched this committee move slowly and deliberately about water for the past two sessions, and wants to thank the committee for giving this topic so much attention and effort. We stand in support of HB 2686, though largely because of the quality work of the committee rather than the specific provisions of the bill itself.

The Kansas Municipal Utilities interfaces with every aspect of state regulators on matters of water. From securing the supply of water and the work with the Division of Water Resources or Kansas Water Office, or water quality matters with the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, we interface with every state agency perhaps more than any other entity.

We want to make it abundantly clear: we work fine with each of the separate agencies as they are currently configured. However, this is not a comment against the provisions of HB 2686 that would combine all the programs into one agency. If there are efficiencies to be gained, or perhaps even better service than what constituent groups already enjoy, then a combined single agency is worth exploring. We'll leave that discussion to the wisdom of this body.

KMU has also been on the record supporting a long-term, stable source of funding for the Kansas State Water Plan Fund. KMU was a member of the Governor's Blue River Task Force on Water, and we recognize the complicated conversation required to bring everyone to the table when it comes to providing that long-term solution. At the very least, having these discussions at the Legislative level allows all stakeholders the opportunity to discuss these possibilities before lawmakers. Our preference, like probably everyone's preference that would pay into the water plan fund, would be that we handle it in the way the Governor's budget handles it this year – by fully funding the state water plan fund through State General Fund (SGF) dollars. However, we recognize that budget scenarios like this year will not be the standard for every year, and the state must somehow plan for a stable source of funding for its water plan fund.

Finally, KMU supports a full discussion on representation on GMD Boards. We have municipal water system members that are entirely outside Groundwater Management Districts, we have members that are entirely inside Groundwater Management Districts, and we have members that have only a portion of their communities within a Groundwater Management District. As you can imagine, our diverse experiences in and around Groundwater Management Districts creates a diverse set of opinions on how they should exist with municipalities. Some cities get along just fine being fully embedded in their GMDs – others have a more strained relationship.

What we can say is this: we support any time our citizens are enfranchised – particularly when they live entirely within a legally defined district that has the power to levy funds. Water is for the benefit of all Kansans, and each of the Kansans that live in municipalities deserve the right to vote on jurisdictional districts devoted to water.

Thank you and we will stand for questions at the appropriate time.