

February 15, 2022

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

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

To Whom it May Concern:

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony on House Bill 2686. I am Sarah Hill-Nelson, and I am a member of the Kansas Regional Advisory Committee (RAC), and also represent The Bowersock Mills & Power Company (BMPC), the only operating hydroelectric power plant Kansas and a holder of one of the oldest and largest water rights in the state. My testimony represents my personal views as a member of the Kansas RAC and as an Owner/Operator of BMPC.

Thank you to the committee members of the House Water Committee for their work to assess the management of water in the State of Kansas and to craft legislation that will address what is widely acknowledged to be an unwieldy system of water management.

- I strongly support passage of HB 2686. Water quality and quantity issues across the state need the attention of a cabinet-level agency. Water is the most valuable resource in Kansas as our reliance on water is unparalleled. HB 2686 will establish the organization and level of funding necessary to protect this critical resource.
- Throughout my tenure as a member of the Kansas RAC, I have received consistent comments from the public that the management of water in the state needs to be streamlined. The existing system can fairly be described as labyrinthine, as responsibility and funding for the protection of water quality and quantity in the state is divided among myriad agencies. The current system presents significant challenges for agencies making efforts to coordinate with one another, as well as Kansans seeking to work with agencies to improve their own practices that impact water quality and supply. HB 2686 is a bipartisan solution that will reorganize and streamline management and facilitate efficient and effective measures to protect our state water supply.
- State efforts to protect water quality and quantity for the future have been chronically underfunded. HB 2686 addresses underfunding by establishing permanent and increased funding mechanisms for water quality and quantity improvement projects. It spreads funding responsibility equitably across municipal, industrial, and agricultural interests.
- To maintain the bipartisan spirit of the proposed legislation and order to ensure bipartisan support for future funding for water I echo the suggestion made by others to add a balance of political parties as a criterion for appointments to the Water & Environment Maintenance Board.
- To acknowledge the complexity of water issues and the depth of experience and knowledge necessary to develop expertise in this field, I recommended that the Director of each division be permanent employees rather than political appointees. This would preserve critical expertise and allow the state to maintain continuity and historical knowledge of efforts made to protect water quality and quantity.
- As a member of the Kansas RAC, I support the continued existence of RACs, which provide a mechanism to incorporate grassroots input on water issues.

- As with many other commenters, I urge the House Water Committee to increase the state's portion of the State Water Plan Fund. The statutory demand transfer of \$6 million from the general fund and \$2 million from the economic development initiatives fund has been shorted by \$84.6 million in the last 15 years, and the allocation has not been increased since the inception of the fund in 1989. While various mechanisms for funding have been proposed, I encourage consideration of a drinking water fee which would apply uniformly to all Kansans using municipal water. As all individuals consume relatively similar amounts of water and only a very small percentage of Kansans do not use municipal water, this would ensure that nearly all Kansans would be making equitable contributions to the protection of water resources in the state irrespective of their livelihood.

I applaud the House Water Committee for taking steps to address the management of water in our state. There is no more important resource for the future of Kansas. Our future depends on efficient management and adequate funding to protect water quality and quantity for today and for future generations. I respectfully request that HB 2686 be passed by the Committee.

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