

NORTHWEST KANSAS GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT DISTRICT NO. 4

Brett Oelke, President

TESTIMONY OPPOSING HB 2686

February 17, 2022

**PO Box 905
Colby, Kansas 67701-0905
Phone: (913) 462-3915
Fax: (913) 462-2693
E-mail: skenyon@gmd4.org**

ISSUE: HB 2686

The Northwest Kansas Groundwater Management District #4 (GMD 4) is in opposition to HB 2686. GMD 4 strongly supports local efforts to extend the life of the High Plains Ogallala Aquifer for current and future generations in Northwest Kansas. GMD 4 took action to extend the life of the aquifer through two Local Enhanced Management Areas (LEMAs) that have proven to be successful in reducing declines. These actions allow local control in managing water level declines and the destiny of the communities that depend on the High Plains Ogallala Aquifer

GMD 4 supports creating the Department of Water and Environment if several issues are addressed in this bill. The most concerning is the GMD election procedure. GMD 4 strongly encourages all water users to be involved in local water issues and strongly believes every water user should be represented by the board of directors. However, the way the bill is written could allow for many and significant beneficial use types to not be represented on the board of directors. The language as proposed in HB 2686 would allow any registered voter to represent and potentially exclude representation of a critical beneficial use type for the region, specifically agricultural users. And the Legislature should not impose term limits on board directors because institutional knowledge of water right law and operations is extremely beneficial to stakeholders. Those veteran board members are a resource in water management and decision-making regarding water policy.

The last opposition by GMD 4 is the proposed water right fee. GMD 4 currently assess water users and eligible voters within its district boundaries to fund locally developed water management programs. The water right fee would be an additional fee on what stakeholders are already paying for water locally. We support a water right fee but not in GMD's that already assess a water right fee.

If changes to this bill were considered with the above points addressed GMD 4 would be in support of the water bill.