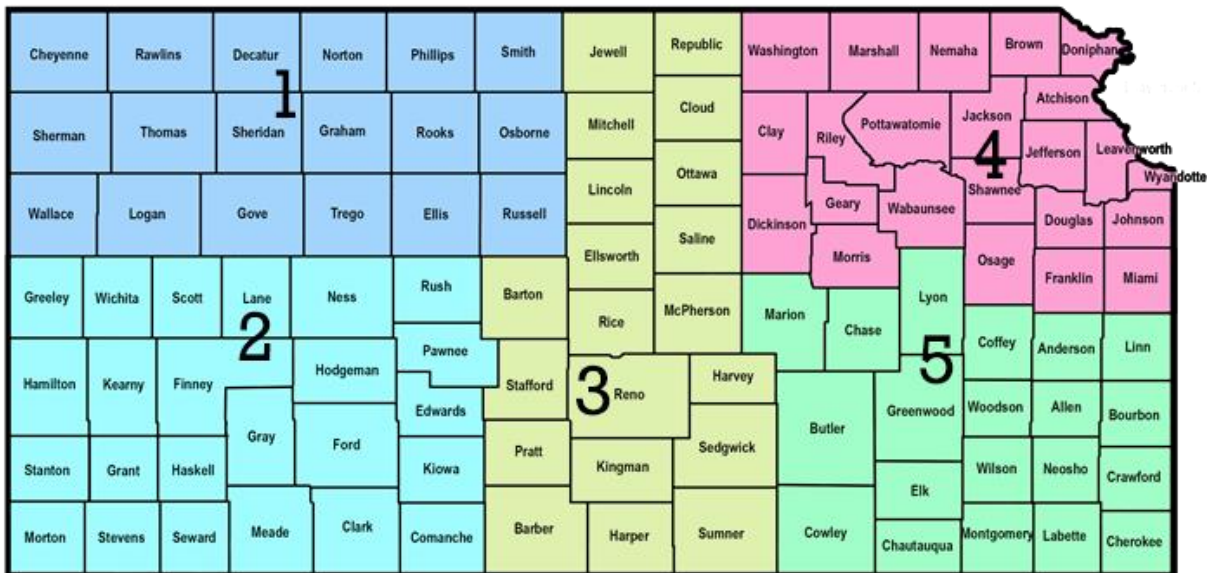


**Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 36  
to the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources  
by Kelsey Olson, Deputy Secretary  
Kansas Department of Agriculture  
March 4, 2025**

Good afternoon, Chairman Rahjes and members of the committee. My name is Kelsey Olson and I serve as the Deputy Secretary for the Kansas Department of Agriculture. I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of Senate Bill 36.

The Kansas Department of Agriculture Division of Conservation works with local Conservation Districts in all 105 counties. These districts are composed of 5 regions, each of which is represented by a commissioner on the State Conservation Commission. These districts are set in statute.



The districts create and execute programs that work with producers to address water quality, water conservation, soil erosion, flood control, and to secure local water resources. The priorities of the Conservation Districts include delivery of local financial and technical assistance, reduction of sedimentation and nutrient and pesticide runoff, water quality protection and restoration in streams and above reservoirs, the protection and sustainability of the Ogallala and related aquifers, and the promotion of conservation practices that improve soil health.

The Conservation Districts also allow for local leadership to work with their constituents to address and support local natural resources through voluntary conservation efforts. Each Conservation District serves as the local government responsible for natural resources within the county. The elected citizens within the district serve as supervisors and provide communication between local and state agencies and the people in the local communities.

In addition, Conservation Districts have a strong partnership with Natural Resources Conservation Service field office staff, working with them to deliver federal funding for producers through programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Steward Program CSP, Agricultural Conservation Easement Program (ACEP), and Wetland Reserve Enhancement Program (WREP).

As a part of this state and local partnership, county Conservation Districts receive a portion of funding through the State Water Plan Fund which is administered by KDA. Districts submit a special request for conservation activities to the Division of Conservation. All requests up to \$25,000 are met. SB 36 raises the current cap of \$25,000 to \$50,000 per district.

Over the years, counties have shown a willingness to dedicate more funding to the program than the funding that is currently provided by the state. The last time that the state contribution provided a full 1:1 contribution to the county allocations as prescribed in K.S.A. 2-1907(c) was in 2008, the same year the match level was raised from \$10,000 to \$25,000.

Conservation Districts were allocated \$3,502,706 for FY 25 by the Legislature. This increase was possible through the passage of HB 2302. However, without any amendments to the current authorizing statute, the actual state match contribution would revert to \$2,559,400 (total amount of allocations at or below \$25,000).

At the district level, these funds are used for operation expenses to carry out the functions of the district. The district offices employ one staff person. Currently, these offices are able to provide a low-paying salary without retirement or health benefits. Post COVID-19, there has been a high rate of turnover of managers within the districts. The high staff turnover is adversely affecting conservation program delivery at the state and federal levels.

With the match level raised to \$50,000, over 90 counties would meet or exceed a full match. By increasing the state's contribution, KDA believes that counties may feel encouraged to provide additional local funding to further support local Conservation Districts and the valuable work that they conduct locally.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 36. I'm happy to stand for questions at the appropriate time.