

Written Testimony in Support of HB 2112

Representative Pickert and members of the Committee on Water,

Kurt Bookout

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My name is Kurt Bookout and I am writing to express my strong support for HB 2112, which seeks to remove the \$25 cap on water certification exams. As the former Director of Public Utilities and a Class IV Water and Wastewater Operator, I dedicated 33 years to protecting public health by ensuring that those responsible for providing potable water are knowledgeable and well-trained. Since my retirement in 2021, I have spent the last three years traveling across Kansas, training water and wastewater operators in 54 communities. This experience has opened my eyes to a very alarming issue: across our great state, hundreds of public water suppliers are struggling to find well trained, certified operators.

Access to clean and safe drinking water is a fundamental necessity for all Kansans. Proper training and certification of water professionals are essential in maintaining and improving water quality, ensuring compliance with state and federal regulations and protecting public health. However, for nearly 40 years the Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) has been hamstrung by outdated legislation that prevents examination fees from being increased. This restriction severely limits the state's ability to provide adequate training and certification programs. By removing this outdated restriction, HB 2112 will allow Kansas to modernize its approach to training and certifying water operators, ensuring that our public water systems are managed by knowledgeable and well-equipped professionals.

The water industry is facing increasing challenges, including aging infrastructure, evolving environmental concerns, and workforce shortages. Investing in a well-trained and highly skilled workforce will help mitigate these challenges and ensure that Kansas continues to provide safe and sustainable water to its residents. Removing this fee cap is a reasonable and necessary step toward achieving this goal. I urge you to support HB 2112 and prioritize the integrity of our water systems by ensuring that water professionals have the resources and training necessary to uphold the highest standards of water safety.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to the well-being of Kansans and respectfully ask for your support of this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Kurt Bookout

Former Director of Public Utilities, Class IV Water & Wastewater Operator