

## **Proponent Testimony**

### **House Bill 2112 – Amendment to K.S.A.65-4513 Relating to Fees for Water and Wastewater Operators And Revoking K.S.A. 65-4506**

#### **House Water Committee Kansas Department of Health and Environment Testimony**

**January 30, 2025**

Chairman Minnix and Members of the House Water Committee:

The Kansas Department of Health and Environment (KDHE) supports House Bill 2112 which will allow KDHE to charge the actual cost for a water or wastewater operator certification examination and repeals K.S.A 65-4506 which removes the correspondence course in lieu of classroom instruction to meet certification requirements.

The KDHE currently has five (5) levels of certification for drinking water operators and five levels of certification for wastewater operators. Classifications are based on the type of treatment used and the population served at each water or wastewater utility. Each classification has a separate examination that individuals must pass with a 70% or higher score to become certified.

Eliminating the examination fee cap of \$25 will allow KDHE to provide a variety of examination formats and expand the opportunities for more examination locations. For example, the wastewater certification program is currently exploring the possibility of providing examinations through community colleges through a pilot program with Johnson County and Allen County communities colleges. However, the cost exceeds the \$25 examination fee for this service. The drinking water certification program is currently reviewing options using 3<sup>rd</sup> party vendors for examination development and administration. Costs range from \$46 to \$104 per examination based on the format (paper or electronic) and use of proctors (KDHE or 3<sup>rd</sup> party). If HB 2112 becomes law, KDHE will set examination fees through regulation which provides an opportunity for public comment.

Speaking to the drinking water certification program only, the quality of the test questions and the ability to customize examinations for the diversity of water treatment systems has hampered the education and training of the next generation of operators. Water systems comprise ground water systems, surface water systems, ground water under the influence of surface water systems and distribution only systems that purchase finished drinking water from another supplier. The population served by these systems spans from dozens of people to over 400,000. In discussions with the utility associations in the state, the consensus is

that streamlining the testing process will improve the quality of operators certified to run water supply systems, as well as improvements to the ongoing education and training of the operator workforce.

Removing the \$25 cap will allow KDHE the flexibility to utilize external services to provide customized, consistent examinations for operators by eliminating the constraint of capped fees that are inadequate to cover the costs of those examinations.

Finally, the option of utilizing a correspondence course in lieu of classroom training has never been developed by KDHE. Classroom training and education by individuals that have experienced the nuances of system operations are most effective at raising the technical acumen of water and wastewater operators that one cannot glean from static reading material.

We believe the change brought about by House Bill 2112 provides the flexibility to ensure KDHE can maintain a strong operator certification program. Therefore, KDHE stands in support of House Bill 2112 and urges its passage.