

Kansas House Water Committee
February 16, 2022
House Bill 2686

Kay Heley
In-Person Testimony in Support

Chairman Highland and members of the Committee

Thank you for allowing my oral, in-person testimony in support of HB 2686 which includes consolidating water management under one agency, the Kansas Department of Water and Environment, as well as slightly increasing and adding water-use fees that are paid by both consumers and producers.

My name is Kay Heley. I am a retired public health nurse, a grandmother and an elected member of a public drinking water utility. I am speaking today as an individual who understands that water is a precious and finite resource and that water quality and water quantity are inextricably linked. I want to thank this Committee for all the time you have spent learning about the 16 state agencies that currently manage water in Kansas and listening to Kansans whose lives and livelihoods are threatened by the challenges to water quality and water quantity throughout our state.

Water management in Kansas is currently very complex. As a Kansas resident with a question about any aspect of water, it is difficult to decide where to begin to find an answer – Department of Agriculture? KDHE? The Kansas Water Office? Department of Wildlife and Parks? The Water Authority? My watershed's Regional Advisory Committee? If the question involves both water quality and water quantity like a question about a permit for a water right in a uranium-contaminated site, or the impacts of flooding on cattle, fish or a water/wastewater treatment plant, the answers might differ depending on which Department I turn to first. HB 2686 simplifies water management in Kansas by creating one agency, the Kansas Department of Water and Environment, with 3 Divisions to oversee and be accountable for the planning, the permitting and the funding. One agency provides efficiencies, reduces gaps and overlaps, allows for more collaborative problem-solving and increases the accessibility and accountability for funding and expenditures. As a Kansas taxpayer, one agency makes asking questions easier and saves Kansas and me money.

Water management funding for this precious resource is woefully inadequate. Our Kansas Water Plan, our 14 Regional Advisory Committees and the Kansas Water Authority together have multiple solutions to water quality and quantity challenges all across Kansas. The Kansas Water Plan has been unfunded or underfunded since its inception. Estimates of the underfunding exceed \$85 million. Each year, \$8 million is requested from the State and that

amount has never been calibrated for inflation or cost increases. HB 2686 includes a slight increase in the Water Protection pass-through fee paid mainly by drinking water consumers and adds a new, small water rights fee (maximum \$250) paid mainly by producers so both groups contribute. I urge this committee to include in HB 2686 an additional increase in the state's required annual contribution to the Water Plan Fund. We have the solutions to many water challenges that are impacting the lives and livelihoods of many Kansans. The solutions require funding. Communities are running out of time.

As a grandmother, my eyes are toward the future of water in our state. We are learning more about the intricate, connected and balancing relationship between groundwater and surface water. We are seeing more drought and more flooding. Neither rivers, aquifers, nor watersheds are contained by county or state boundaries. We can choose to focus on the divisions of western/eastern, consumer/producer, or rural/urban water perspectives. Or we can commit instead to focus on protecting the quantity and quality of all the water in our state for the benefit of all Kansans. Fifty years from now, I hope there are still mothers and grandmothers living in towns from Garden City to Atchison, and Atwood to Parsons and that they benefit because we chose to focus on protecting all of our precious, life-sustaining water.

HB 2686 saves taxpayer money, simplifies a complex and costly water management system, begins to increase funding for the solutions already in our Kansas Water Plan and contributes to an important, on-going discussion about our commitment to the future of safe, plentiful and affordable water for all Kansans, regardless of address.

I support HB 2686 and ask that the committee recommend this bill favorably for passage. Thank you for your time and consideration.

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