



Testimony Submitted to the
House Water Committee
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Testimony in Support of HB 2302

Kansas Municipal Utilities (KMU) is the statewide association representing Kansas cities and other public or not-for-profit agencies involved in the ownership and operation of municipal utilities across Kansas. Formed in 1928, KMU provides assistance and information to members with regard to workforce training and educational programs, Mutual Aid, regulatory and legislative assistance and numerous other services toward the advancement of municipal utilities to achieve maximum benefits for the customer-owners served by our utilities. Our membership ranges in size from some of the largest utilities in the state such as those operated by the Kansas City Board of Public Utilities and the City of Wichita down to some of the smallest utility systems in the state serving fewer than 100 customers.

On behalf of the community-owned utilities across the state, KMU would like to express its support of HB 2302. The issue of long-term funding for the state water plan fund is not new to Kansas Municipal Utilities and our members – we were member participants of the Governor’s Blue Ribbon Task Force on Water in the 2010s and most other long-term water funding conversations that have occurred across the state over the last several decades.

The chronic cycle of study/discuss/report/inaction on a long-term funding plan for water is why HB 2302 is so important. The makeup of the Blue Ribbon Task Force on Water wasn’t incorrect – it was a group of individuals representing agriculture, cities, industry, reservoirs, and long-term interests – and many of the very same people on that Task Force are in this room today. The key missing ingredient to most other discussions was the situation we find ourselves in now – a true consciousness about water and its potential lack thereof coupled with, a state ending balance that can sustain the support of the water plan, and this committee’s commitment to do something.

Kansas Municipal Utilities recently reported to the House Committee on Water about the services we provide communities across Kansas to make sure they can supply safe, clean drinking water to Kansans. This bill specifically addresses some of those concerns by creating a grant fund program for communities and also by creating a technical assistance fund so that

communities can satisfy the requirements necessary to qualify for federal assistance, something many small communities simply do not have the bandwidth to do right now.

Along those lines, Kansas Municipal Utilities would suggest two adjustments to the bill as you deliberate.

- First, we would recommend changing the threshold for the weighted community size from 2,000 or less to 5,000 or less.
- Second, we would recommend changing the language from a sunset in five years to a review of funding and programs in five years.

Regarding the grant threshold, as the state association tasked with implementing and facilitating most of these water projects, we think communities of 5,000 or less better captures the range of cities that struggle to have the staffing available to prepare and implement large water infrastructure projects. We recognize that the bill does not prohibit larger cities from applying for and receiving these funds right now, but we think the weighting factor should apply to just a few more communities, many of whom are waiting on technical assistance right now. No arbitrary population line will ever be perfect, but increasing the threshold to 5,000 will catch more communities in need.

Regarding the sunset language, KMU appreciates the difficulty of pulling together the critical mass to do something significant on water policy. While placing a sunset on the bill might help it pass the House and Senate, we know that the issues creating the impetus to provide funding – declining aquifers and available storage in reservoirs, more problems with water quality, and more external demands on water nationwide – will only be worse in five years. If the Kansas Legislature is capable of doing something this year, in 2023, we encourage you to sustain it as long as possible in the hopes that we can begin to recover from years of chronic underfunding.

Finally, KMU would like to say that even being here today having this discussion is a milestone for all Kansans. This debate *feels* different to debates on this topic in the past. It feels as though we may have assembled the right mix of people to get a consequential bill across the finish line that begins to address our long-term water issues. Kansas Municipal Utilities is proud to be a partner in this effort and stands ready to assist as we hopefully move HB 2302 forward.