Date: March 10, 2025
To: Chairman Virgil Peck, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
From: Shahira Stafford, Kansas Cooperative Council
RE: Proponent Written Testimony on HB 2113

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Bill 2113 on behalf of the Kansas Cooperative Council (Co-op Council).

Formed in 1944, the Co-op Council is a voluntary trade association representing all forms of cooperatively structured business in Kansas. Our purpose is to further the understanding of cooperative principals, methods of doing business, and the impact co-ops have on our state's rural economy. Kansas co-ops have over 575 locations, employ over 5,000 people, and represent over 116,000 members.

Our organization mostly represents agricultural cooperatives whose farmer-owners are directly impacted by drought conditions and the continued reduction of water resources across the state.

House Bill 2113 establishes a new state conservation fund with $5 million in annual funding that will provide essential matching grants for water conservation projects. The 2:1 matching ratio will incentivize private investment in water conservation, allowing our farmer-owners to implement more sustainable practices.

The increased funding for the state water plan – rising to $55 million annually – demonstrates Kansas's commitment to addressing long-term water sustainability. Our cooperative members, who operate grain elevators and ag retail operations, depend on reliable water infrastructure in their daily operations.

We particularly appreciate the workforce development provisions that are important to our sector. The allocation of funds for water management positions, including engineers and environmental scientists, is desperately needed to help attract the expertise to our rural communities tackling these water challenges.

Our member cooperatives are well-positioned to partner with conservation districts and nonprofit organizations to implement water quality and infrastructure projects that benefit both agricultural producers and the communities we serve. HB 2113 shows a continued commitment by the Legislature to preserve one of our state's most precious resources for generations to come, and we respectfully ask for your support.