

Dorothy Barnett
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HB 2686 – Reorganization of Water Related Agencies and Fees for Water Funding
Oral Proponent

Chairman Highland, Vice Chair Orr and Ranking member Vaughn, thank you for allowing me to testify in support of HB 2686. My name is Dorothy Barnett, I direct the Climate + Energy Project (CEP), a fifteen-year-old Kansas based nonprofit. CEP works to support the transition to a carbon free economy through programs and policy.

CEP is part of a coalition of nonprofits across the state working together to build a healthy and resilient Kansas. WEALTH – Water, Energy, Air, Land, Transportation and Health represents thousands of Kansans. One of our coalition priorities is to fully fund the state’s water plan and we were thrilled to see that included in Governor Kelly’s budget this year.

We support SB 2686 because of its intent to bring together the agencies and divisions all working on water quality, quantity and conservation. We also understand the need to fund the water plan in the future and support a fee structure. We would leave to others to determine if the amount proposed in legislation is appropriate.

According to the National Climate Assessment,¹ food, energy and water systems are inseparable. Any change in demand for one will impact demand on the other two. Kansas is part of the Southern Great Plains region and under both lower- and higher-scenario climate change projections, the number of days exceeding 100°F is projected to increase markedly across the Southern Great Plains by the end of the century. We are already seeing the frequency of severe weather including severe local storms, floods and droughts.

As the population in the region grows, rapid urbanization and economic development opportunities will drive an increase in the demand for food, energy, and water. Water is used in every aspect of agricultural production and electricity generation. Energy is required to extract and deliver water of sufficient quality for diverse human and agricultural use, as well as healthy consumption and wastewater treatment. Both water and energy are required to irrigate and process agricultural products and livestock to feed the region’s increasing population. The complex interdependencies at the food–energy–water nexus create enormous challenges.

We are concerned that little is mentioned about any potential impacts to our states environment if you move Environment out of the Kansas Department of Health and Environment. While yes, water and the environment are intimately connected, Environment is responsible for six different divisions that are tasked with protecting the public and the environment. We do not want to sacrifice the good work on the environment for the sake of water. We hope to hear from committee members how to ensure environmental protection will remain strong with the merging of water and environment.

¹ <https://nca2018.globalchange.gov/chapter/23/>

Air - To protect the public and the environment from air pollution.

Environmental Field Services - The Bureau of Environmental Field Services (BEFS) administers all environmental program operations at the six Kansas Department of Health and Environment district offices and provides scientific, technical, and operational support for the KDHE Division of Environment programs.

Environmental Remediation - The Bureau of Environmental Remediation provides assessments and cleanup assistance at contaminated sites to facilitate redevelopment of contaminated sites; emergency response to pollutant spills, natural disasters or coal mine subsidence; regulatory oversight of activities at contaminated sites and permitting of regulated facilities to ensure proper design and pollution prevention.

Kansas Health & Environmental Laboratories - The Kansas Health and Environmental Laboratories (KHEL) provide approximately 1 million clinical and environmental tests each year to protect the citizens of Kansas and help ensure the quality of statewide laboratory services through certification and improvement programs.

Waste Management – Manages a host of issues from regulations and guidance to solid and hazardous waste and everything in between.

Water - The Bureau of Water administers programs related to public water supplies, wastewater treatment systems, the disposal of sewage and nonpoint sources of pollution. Programs are designed to provide safe drinking water, prevent water pollution and assure compliance with state and federal laws and regulations such as the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act.

Thank you again for your work on this legislation, please take the first step to protect our states water quality, quantity and environmental future.