



Testimony Submitted to the
Senate Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources
March 14, 2022

Kimberly Svaty, Legislative Counsel
Kansas Municipal Utilities

Testimony in Support of Senate Bills 548 and 549

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee:

On behalf of Kansas Municipal Utilities and its members, we appear in support of Senate Bills 548 and 549 regarding groundwater management districts (GMDs).

Kansas Municipal Utilities (KMU) is the statewide association of community owned and operated electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, stormwater, and telecommunications utilities across Kansas. As a non-profit association established by its member utilities in 1928, KMU is dedicated to serving the needs and interests of our consumer-owned utilities and the citizens, businesses, and industries that they serve. KMU membership ranges from cities the size of Kansas City and Wichita to small communities the size of Isabel and Palmer with less than 100 meters.

We agree and support the overall statutory charge of groundwater management districts to properly manage groundwater resources. However, we are concerned about the equitable representation allowed to municipal water suppliers in policy development and the governance of the groundwater resources within the district. Our organization has member water utilities within the boundaries of each of the groundwater management districts across the state. As we have continued to monitor the governance of these districts, we have found that there is limited potential for municipalities to participate in the policy-making that can directly impact their municipal groundwater resources.

KMU supports a full discussion regarding municipal participation on GMD boards. We have municipal water system members that are entirely outside groundwater management districts, we have members that are entirely inside groundwater management districts, and we have members that have only a portion of their communities within a groundwater management district. As you can imagine, our diverse experiences in and around groundwater management districts creates a diverse set of opinions on how they should exist with municipalities. Some cities get along just fine being fully embedded in their GMDs – others have a more strained relationship when it comes to policies, representation, and assessment of fees.

One of the primary issues with GMDs is their direct involvement in water rights. The legislation proposed in Senate Bill 548 would limit the role and involvement of groundwater management districts as it relates to water rights (and any changes thereto), particularly as it would impact municipal water rights.

Senate Bill 549 would actually provide the holders of a non-irrigation water right dedicated to a beneficial use with the option of withdrawing from the GMD if the water right holder determined that it was in their best interest.



The Water Appropriation Act established that the water of Kansas belongs to the people of Kansas. Currently there is a substantial difference in governance between our member communities whose rights are handled directly by the Division of Water Resources, and those member communities whose rights are “reviewed” sometimes indefinitely by the Groundwater Management District in which the community exists. We support the original mission of the Groundwater Management Districts, but when the leadership structure of the boards offers little opportunity for municipal input and the Groundwater Management District board exerts undue influence on municipal water interests, we support efforts such as SB 548 and SB 549 to provide clarification or remedy.

Thank you for your consideration of SB 548 and SB 549.