



Joe Warren, Administrative Services Director

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To: Senate Ethics, Elections and Local Government Committee

From: Joe Warren, Director of Administrative Services

Date: March 21, 2019

Re: Testimony in Support of HB 2188

Honorable Chairwoman Bowers,

The City of Atchison supports HB 2188 because the White Clay Watershed District No. 26 Board exists more in theory than practice. Yes, there is a board. Yes, the board does meet periodically, but the board's authority and actions are limited to approving the annual budget – which triggers the levying of mills each year. City staff is responsible for the creation of that budget and through an agreement with the District that stretches back to 1966, the City of Atchison owns, insures, and maintains the 25 dams within the district.

The City of Atchison and the Watershed Board have been able to maintain this relationship over the years, but with some unnecessary headaches, costs and demands on staff time. City staff is responsible for organizing watershed board meetings from coordinating board member schedules, to writing agendas, making presentations, taking minutes, and planning and publishing annual board elections and budget hearings. Over time, it has become increasingly difficult to find board members and garner consistent enough attendance at meetings to ensure a quorum. In fact, the City has been required to re-publish notices for public hearings multiple times because we were unable to reach a quorum at the annual meeting and budget hearing. The watershed board currently has a vacancy that we've been unable to fill since last August, despite having City staff and current board members actively seek out interest.

In addition to the dearth of board participation, the district lacks the depth of the financial capacity that the City enjoys. The City has a rolling 5-year Capital Improvement Plan as part of our annual budgeting process, which allows the flexibility to pursue larger projects by utilizing revenues from multiple years at a time. Because the Watershed District is financially distinct from the City, it does not have access to the same capital projects fund balance as the rest of the City's priorities. This makes it more difficult to program a capital improvement plan for watershed infrastructure without increasing the mill levy substantially and putting an undue burden on local taxpayers.

Dissolving the district would also allow the state to reduce the number of government entities in Kansas by one. According to the U.S. Census Bureau 2012 Census of Governments, Kansas ranks 6th in the nation in total units of local government. Dissolution of White Clay Watershed District No. 26 won't change Kansas' ranking, but it will create efficiency and eliminate an unnecessary level of red tape. HB 2188 is good for Atchison and is good for Kansas.