

STATE OF KANSAS
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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DOUG BLEX
12TH DISTRICT

March 6, 2024

Chairman Rahjes and Committee Members:

I encourage the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee to support HB 2800. In another portion of my other life, I served on the Montgomery County Conservation District Board of Supervisors for nine years, I served as chairman for six years. I want to emphasize the word “served”. The Conservation District (CD) is composed of five volunteers who serve on the board of supervisors. There are 105 CDs in Kansas, formed due to the major soil erosion problems during the Dust Bowl, which prompted the passage of the Conservation District Law in 1937. Labette County was the first CD formed in 1938. Almost all counties have a District Manager position, some smaller counties may share one District Manager position.

The primary funding for CD comes from these sources: The State of Kansas through the Division of Conservation, Kansas Department of Agriculture and local county commissioners providing funds for CD operation. The current funding is a one-to-one match by the state up to a \$25,000 cap. Many counties will provide the maximum match of \$25,000 to maximize funding. Many of the smaller counties are only able to provide \$12-15,000.

The CDs provide local leadership, education of youth, education of producers, many of them own specialized equipment such as native grass drills, tree planters, etc. to rent to local producers, present workshops and are generally the first point of contact in a Farm Service Agency building.

The District Managers have historically been underpaid with limited benefits, many times a volunteer board is faced with hiring, training and doing it all again in a few short months. When those vacancies occur for several months at a time the board chair is responsible for renting grass drills, making sure bills are paid and keeping the operation going. Trust me, that is not a fun time for a volunteer board member, and this comes from a voice of experience.

HB 2800 would increase the state match on a two-to-one match with a cap of \$50,000. This increase would certainly help the smaller rural counties fund their conservation district operations.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Doug Blex". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Doug Blex, House District 12