

STATE OF KANSAS



**Senator Elaine Bowers
District 36**

**Appropriations Committee
Testimony in Support of HB2468
January 24, 2024**

Thank you for allowing me to testify today in support of HB2468. Understanding this bill addresses weather-related emergency declaration from the Governor and funding; my involvement begins with serving on the Governor's Wildfire Task Force with Representative Troy Waymaster.

This task force met several times over the last year and with its members representing a cross section of people from across the state who could help mold a plan moving forward for wildfire prevention, response, and recovery because we all know it is not "if" there will be another wildfire incident but when and where.

The committee, chaired by Agriculture Secretary Beam, did not focus a lot of time on the cause of past fires or blame, but recognized ways to prevent future ones with actions the committee agreed upon to make the fires easier to contain and fight with all levels including state resources and the National Guard. We also recognized the importance of partnerships and collaboration between agencies and the local firefighters. As much as this collaboration is important, often overlooked is the prevention of fires (such as reducing fuel loads), but also the recovery afterwards. Troy and I both toured the counties after the Four-County fire in 2022 and witnessed the devastation of properties, buildings, and livestock. Developing strategies for long-term recovery was not overlooked in this process. Agencies will continue to work with the counties and the federal agencies to help for a quicker recovery. We wanted to note the significant role of volunteer firefighters and the challenges local communities face in the recruitment and retention of our volunteers across the state.

I appreciate Representative Waymaster for crafting a piece of legislation not only to incorporate ideas from the Wildlife Task Force but also for weather related disasters. We also have had flooding in our shared legislative districts. A procedure is laid out with "who" is in charge during the event so there can be no mistake of the chain of command. And then a procedure for the aftermath of the event with a plan in place to work with the effected counties. Importantly, a fund to be established with oversight from the State Finance Council to ensure these funds are spent appropriately for events and personnel to carry out a recognized and adopted plan.

Thank you again for your time.

Senator Elaine Bowers