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Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

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March 11, 2021

The Honorable Rep. Rick Hansen
Chair, House Environment and Natural Resources Finance and Policy Committee

**Re: HF 936 (Lippert) soil health cost-sharing program;
HF 932 (Fischer) Water quality and storage program**

Dear Chair Hansen, Chair Fischer, Rep. Lippert, and Committee Members:

On behalf of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, thank you for the opportunity to provide input on HF 936 (Lippert) soil health cost-sharing program, and HF 932 (Fischer) Water quality and storage program.

MASWCD supports the underlying intent of these bills, which we understand are part of Governor Walz's climate initiatives for this session. **These bills both speak to priorities of SWCDs across the state and look at opportunities for working with private landowners toward making our lands more resilient in the face of amplified weather events and climate impacts.** We do need to express concerns, however, with the mechanics of the bills in their current forms.

Each of these bills seek to establish new sections of state law in Minnesota Statutes Chapter 103F. **We strongly encourage you to consider placing these efforts into appropriation language, as an alternative to codifying into statute the language as proposed.**

Both bills lay out their respective programs as being financial assistance to local units of government with the meaning given under section [103B.305](#). For ease of reference, this includes "municipalities, towns, counties, soil and water conservation districts, watershed districts, organizations formed for the joint exercise of powers under section [471.59](#), and other special purpose districts or authorities exercising authority in water and related land resources management at the local level." To our knowledge, these local units of government did not seek the new frameworks laid out in these bills and have not had an opportunity to fully understand them.

Regarding HF 932 (Fischer) Water quality and storage program, we have serious concerns about the BWSR technical assistance role and the requirements placed on delivery of the program. And without a definition of the types of water storage practices the program is seeking to deliver, this seems especially premature for codifying into statute.

MASWCD represents the state's 88 soil and water conservation districts, including their 440 elected supervisors and their more than 460 employees. Soil and Water Conservation Districts are political subdivisions of the State established under Minnesota Statute Chapter 103C. Each SWCD is governed by a board of elected supervisors. And SWCD law is implemented across 100% of the state.



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Regarding HF 936 (Lippert) Soil health cost-sharing program, we believe this effort should simply be directed to the Soil and Water Conservation Districts. SWCDs have a long-standing technical role with soil health as well as established relationships with agricultural producers. It would be duplicative and inefficient to offer a soil health program to other local units of government.

Thank you for your consideration. We look forward to continuing to work with the bill authors on these important SWCD issues.

Sincerely,

Sheila Vanney

Assistant Director

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