Chair Dave Lislegard
House Property Tax Division
451 State Office Building
100 Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.
St. Paul, MN 55155

Re: Soil and Water Conservation Aid Program HF735 January 30, 2023

Dear Chair Lislegard and committee members,

As you consider HF735, annual aid to Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCDs), we write to convey our support for this proposal. SWCDs are essential partners in protecting and restoring Minnesota's waters, habitats, forests, and the resilience of Minnesota's agricultural lands. SWCDs provide essential services to landowners for land and water conservation across Minnesota. Stable, long-term funding for SWCDs is critical. We appreciate the committee is considering SWCD funding from the general fund through the creation of a local government aid program through the Dept. of Revenue.

SWCD staff engage directly with farmers, foresters, other local governments, and landowners to make cleaner water and healthier soils a reality by helping to:

- identify problems,
- provide technical assistance and design solutions,
- find financial support, and
- implement soil and water conservation projects and practices.

Given this vital role, we strongly believe that SWCDs need a stable, sufficient funding source. Consistency of funding is also crucial to allow SWCDs the ability to more deeply engage in long-term planning and relationship building. Time is a key element that is necessary to strategically pursue opportunities to advance conservation goals. Securing their funding through local government aid will:

- Increase stability and support a level of funding that will attract and retain qualified staff,
- Increase funding that can be used to implement projects,
- Leverage Federal and other matching dollars currently being left on the table, and
- Enhance clean water outcomes.

Through our work across Minnesota, we have seen the impact that SWCDs can have when their staff have the resources and relationships they need to be most effective. Ensuring they have a stable funding source will unlock their full potential and lead to the soil and water conservation outcomes we know are possible.

Thank you for your support of HF735.

FRESHWATER

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