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February 23, 2022

The Honorable Paul Marquart
Chair, House Taxes Committee

Re: HF 3669 (Maquart) Administration Tax Bill.

Chair Marquart and Committee Members,

On behalf of the Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, thank you for the opportunity to express our support for the SWCD Aid provisions included in HF 3669.

For the past several years, temporary funding arrangements have allowed the important work of SWCDs to be advanced while we and others worked toward a permanent general fund solution. The state's current budget surplus provides the opportunity to solve funding problems like ours. As a result of deliberations by our Association's statewide leadership, we are advocating for SWCD Aid: a standing, statutory, general fund appropriation through the Department of Revenue to SWCDs. We are grateful that Governor Walz has included this new general fund funding mechanism in his supplemental budget recommendations.

We are seeking \$22 million per year for SWCD Aid, which would replace Clean Water Funds as the source of SWCD Capacity Funds going forward, and which would be at a funding level that gets us closer to meeting our chronically unmet funding needs.

SWCDs are the technical experts and "boots on the ground." Their staff and elected board members have the trust of their community members and are able to help landowners work through conservation programs from start to finish. As water quality and soil health issues are prioritized in Minnesota, SWCDs' roles have expanded and now include helping landowners navigate programs and policies that are increasing in complexity. To face these challenges and increase our pace of progress toward cleaner water and healthier soils, SWCDs need more predictable and more adequate state funding. SWCD Aid will help meet those funding needs.

We strongly urge support for SWCD Aid and thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sheila Vanney
Assistant Director
Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

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. SWCD law is implemented across 100% of the state.