



March 27, 2026

To Whom It May Concern,

Minnesota Rural Water Association (MRWA) is writing in support of SF 4457 and HF 4301, which provide critical funding pathways to assist counties, cities, and townships pursuing the development of regional water systems under Minnesota Statute 116A.

Rural water development has a strong and proven history in Minnesota. Minnesota currently has five existing rural water districts serving approximately 16 counties, all of which were formed over 40 years ago under Minnesota Statute 116A. Since that time, regulatory requirements, project complexity, and overall costs have changed dramatically. Regionalization continues to demonstrate clear benefits, including improved water quality, long-term system reliability, operational efficiency, and cost-effective service delivery for both communities and rural residents. These systems also help address ongoing challenges such as aging infrastructure, operator shortages, and the need for redundancy and resiliency in public water supplies.

However, the process to form a regional water district today has become significantly more complex, time-intensive, and costly. An example is the West Central Regional Water District, a three-county effort in Clay, Polk, and Norman Counties that is actively working through the formation process. This effort has demonstrated just how challenging it is to navigate modern regulations while developing a regional system. The level of engineering, legal coordination, public engagement, and funding strategy required far exceeds what was needed when the original districts were formed decades ago.

Traditional funding avenues do not adequately support the significant upfront planning, engineering, legal, and administrative costs required to navigate Minnesota Statute 116A. These challenges can delay or even prevent viable projects from moving forward. In fact, there have been recent efforts in Minnesota where proposed districts were unable to advance due in part to these barriers, including efforts in Dakota County and Pope County. At the same time, interest in regional water development continues to grow. In addition to the West Central Regional Water District, other counties such as Koochiching and Wilkin are in the early stages of exploring similar efforts. We believe there are many other areas across Greater Minnesota that would benefit from regional water solutions.

Importantly, the communities that stand to gain the most from these systems are often rural areas with limited budgets, staffing, and technical capacity. Providing dedicated funding to support early-stage development will help level the playing field and allow these communities to pursue sustainable, long-term water solutions.

SF 4457 and HF 4301 would provide a meaningful and necessary tool to support the successful formation of regional water systems in Minnesota. MRWA strongly supports this legislation and its intent to improve access to safe, reliable, and affordable drinking water across the state.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lori Blair".

Lori Blair, Executive Director
Minnesota Rural Water Association