

Date: 3-2-21

House Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Environment Committee

Bill: 1st Sub. SB 199 Water Amendments

Sponsor: Sen. McKell

Floor Sponsor: Rep. Hawkes

UASD Position: Support with Amendments

This Bill: addresses issues related to water.

Discussion: Sen. McKell explained that this is a grant program related to metering for small, secondary water users. It only applies to first and second class counties. Lines 76-77 relate to filing or updating a plan. Lines 66-67 deal with rate increases. An increase of more than 10% must be accompanied by an explanation. Rep. Albrecht asked where it applies only to first and second class counties. Sen. McKell referred him to line 131. Rep. Lyman asked if this is a pilot project being tested on small municipalities in large counties. Sen. McKell said an amendment is coming on that point. A city, town, or metro township could choose to apply for this program, but they want to target small, urban users. Rep. Lyman asked where the funds for the grant will come from. Sen. McKell said right now they are asking for general funds. Rep. Lyman asked about mandates. Sen. McKell explained that the only mandate is on line 77, requiring updates to plans. Rep. Lyman asked if these water metering bills are motivated by something. Sen. McKell said metering is extremely important to conservation groups. Nothing is more valuable than awareness of what you're using. Rep. Lyman said this can be an issue for rural areas. Sen. McKell suggested that the Wasatch Front has a bigger problem than rural areas. Rep. Briscoe said he can review his water usage since it's metered. Metering provides data. Rep. Hawkes explained how significantly water usage goes down when it's metered. It's hard to encourage metering, however, because it costs money and provides nothing but information. Rep. Kohler said they'll find extra water in his area if they start giving irrigation companies credit for not using it. He acknowledged that agriculture isn't involved in this bill. Sen. McKell said the legislature is trying to address water banking. Rep. Chew noted that conserving water is good, but expressed concerns about the cost of the bill. He feels that metering doesn't incentivize people to save water. Sen. McKell explained that the grant program is a 50/50 match. He doesn't think it will be funded at \$2 million. Rep. Shipp asked how much one meter costs. Sen. McKell said they're typically \$1000-1500, including installation. Spanish Fork City has saved substantial money on water since they instituted metering. Rep. Snider asked if this bill might address the lack of parity. Sen. McKell said he believes it does.

The Utah Audubon Council and the Utah Division for Water Resources support the bill. The Davis/Weber Counties Canal Company opposes the bill. They feel local water districts and special service districts should not receive special treatment.

Rep. Hawkes moved to amend the bill on line 58, deleting “5,000” and inserting “8,000.” Sen. McKell said the amendment was friendly. The bill was amended. Rep. Chew said this can be better accomplished in other ways that are less expensive. Rep. Briscoe contended that secondary meters are less expensive than the alternative.

Yeas: 7

Nays: 3

N/V: 4

Outcome: 1st Sub. SB 199 passed out of committee with a favorable recommendation.