



CITY OF IMPERIAL BEACH

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June 27, 2024

Governor Gavin Newsom
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Clarification of Request for the State of California to Help Address the Pollution Crisis in the Tijuana River

Dear Governor Newsom,

Thank you for the reassurance from Cal OES in your June 14, 2024, letter regarding your administration's commitment to continue monitoring the pollution impacts in the Tijuana River. We appreciate and recognize the specific efforts you have made to advocate for federal authorities to take responsibility and fund repairs to the failing wastewater infrastructure on both sides of the border. Unfortunately, we still firmly believe the State of California is not doing enough to advocate for urgent federal solutions to the ongoing public health crisis, which is still discharging over one billion gallons per month of untreated wastewater into California's coastal waters.

Given the ongoing magnitude of pollution, with nearly the entire sewer system of Tijuana flowing through the Tijuana River Valley, and the emerging public health impacts this pollution is having on adjacent communities, we feel it is important to clarify our request for emergency actions from the state. It is crucial for the State of California to be the strongest advocate for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's proposed comprehensive infrastructure solution. We feel this issue requires more robust state-level engagement with the federal Biden administration and to the Governor of Baja Norte, Marina del Pilar Olmeda, to ensure that the proposed regional wastewater treatment system for the City of Tijuana gets funded, built, and maintained in perpetuity. The unfortunate reality is that federal agencies are currently only considering a partial fix to control wastewater and trash in the Tijuana River, which falls far short of our community's expectations for a comprehensive infrastructure solution. Prioritizing this comprehensive solution is essential to fully address the environmental and public health crisis affecting our communities.

The pollution crisis in the Tijuana River has surpassed the capacity of local agencies and even the state to manage and control, presenting the option for the State of California to request a federal emergency declaration from the Biden administration. The persistent and immediate challenges faced by our communities demand an escalated response, including advocating for substantial federal support and greater coordination among the numerous federal agencies in the River Valley. Recognizing this situation through a federal state of emergency, or related measure if there is a better option, is a critical step in prioritizing the crisis, enhancing coordination among federal, state, and binational entities, and potentially unlocking vital resources and to expedite the federal process to construct the proposed comprehensive infrastructure solution. This declaration would

not only underscore the severity of the situation but also facilitate a more comprehensive and effective federal response to protect the health and well-being of our communities.

Additionally, the conclusion by the California Department of Public Health that there is no evidence of increased infectious diseases does not fully address the broader spectrum of public health concerns, including long-term exposure to pollutants and the cumulative effects on community health. This is why we are also asking the state to join the County of San Diego in sending a letter to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to intervene and assist in the health monitoring and assessment of community impacts from pollution. The residents of south San Diego are reporting illnesses and rashes that need to be investigated, not ignored.

Finally, we believe the state holds meaningful leverage with the state of Baja California, which manages the water and wastewater utility south of the border. The task of negotiating long-term water supply and wastewater treatment should not solely be left up to the U.S. federal government when the impacts from these decisions have such significant consequences for the state. Active involvement from the State of California in these negotiations can ensure that the needs and health of our communities are adequately represented and addressed.

We appreciate the Governor's efforts and assurances regarding the Tijuana River pollution crisis and urge more robust state-level engagement to advocate for comprehensive federal infrastructure solutions. The ongoing discharge of untreated wastewater poses significant public health risks and requires an immediate federal emergency declaration to enhance coordination and unlock additional resources. We also request the state's support in involving the CDC for health monitoring and leveraging its influence with Baja California to address long-term infrastructure needs. Active state involvement is crucial to effectively mitigate this environmental disaster and protect our communities.

At the City of Imperial Beach, we have decades of firsthand experience dealing with the pollution crisis in the Tijuana River and stand ready to assist the state in any way possible to make this issue a priority. We call upon the state to fully engage its authority and political influence to accelerate the actions of U.S. and Mexican agencies in implementing a comprehensive solution to this crisis.

Sincerely,



Paloma Aguirre
Mayor, City of Imperial Beach