

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 9, 2024

The Honorable Mandy K. Cohen
Director
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
1600 Clifton Road
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Director Cohen,

As members of the California congressional delegation, we write to request that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) immediately investigate the public health impacts of wastewater contamination in the Tijuana River and in the surrounding communities of Imperial Beach, Coronado, and San Diego. We urge the CDC to examine the prevalence of contaminants in the water, soil, and air of these communities, and the connection to community reported increases in gastrointestinal illnesses and other symptoms.

The overburdened wastewater infrastructure in Tijuana, Mexico frequently results in raw sewage being released into the Tijuana River and off the coast of Baja California, ultimately contaminating waters off of southern San Diego County. Some South Bay beaches have been closed due to contamination for more than 800 days. For beaches that remain open, beachgoers routinely report nausea, vomiting, rashes, and other symptoms after coming in contact with the water. Beyond the health threats posed by direct contact with contaminated water, the Scripps Institution of Oceanography recently found that polluted ocean waters can become aerosolized in sea spray, potentially carrying harmful bacteria and toxic chemicals inland. Furthermore, studies have indicated a concentration of harmful pollutants in the region's soil, and elevated levels of hydrogen sulfide and other gases present in regional air samples. All these risk factors have the potential to translate into illnesses and other health impacts, and all should be properly assessed to identify any ongoing public health risks.

We strongly urge the CDC to investigate the impact of wastewater pollution on residents of Imperial Beach, Coronado, and San Diego. The impacts of this ongoing pollution crisis are disproportionately felt by low-income communities of color in the South Bay. Besides local residents, a significant number of federal workers in the region are impacted, including members of the military stationed at the nearby Naval Bases San Diego, Coronado, and Point Loma, as well as U.S. Border Patrol agents stationed in the Tijuana River Valley. Taking into consideration the environmental justice implications of these transboundary flows, as well as their direct impact on federal workers, we ask that you approach this public health assessment with the highest level of urgency.

We look forward to your timely response and working together to address this urgent challenge.

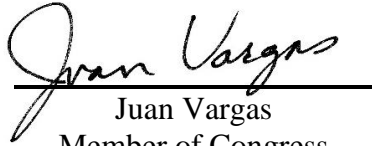
Sincerely,



Laphonza Butler
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



Sara Jacobs
Member of Congress



Mike Levin
Member of Congress