



TERRA LAWSON-REMER

VICE-CHAIR

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: May 6, 2025

18

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

**SUPPORTING NEW TOOLS TO ADDRESS THE TIJUANA RIVER SEWAGE CRISIS
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

When the smell of raw sewage forces teachers to run air purifiers during class and makes lifeguards sick just doing their jobs, you know we're facing more than just a beach closure problem. The Tijuana River sewage crisis is polluting the air we breathe, threatening our public health, and disrupting everyday life across San Diego County, especially in communities that have borne the brunt of cross-border pollution for decades.

For years, South County residents have endured the devastating impacts of raw sewage flowing into the Tijuana River Valley and nearby coastlines, with billions of gallons contaminating our waterways, parks, and communities. This crisis has already led to over 1,000 consecutive days of beach closures, threatening public health, hurting small businesses, and putting working people, from lifeguards to military personnel, directly in harm's way.

Thanks to the steadfast leadership of our San Diego Congressional delegation, the region has secured \$650 million in federal funding to modernize the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant — a hard-fought and long-overdue investment. This funding provides a critical boost for capital improvements, long-term operations, and maintenance of the plant that has historically been underfunded.

At the same time, Congressional leadership under Speaker Mike Johnson is advancing shortsighted cuts to clean water, public health, and infrastructure, putting additional pressure on state and local governments to step up. In the face of these challenges, our region must be ready with every available tool to protect public health and the safety of our coastline.

Two key bills now advancing will help us do exactly that:

**SUBJECT: SUPPORTING NEW TOOLS TO ADDRESS THE TIJUANA RIVER
SEWAGE CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

- State Senate Bill 10, introduced by State Senator Steve Padilla, would authorize SANDAG to dedicate revenue from the soon-to-open Otay East Port of Entry to support sewage treatment and mitigation efforts, potentially generating millions of dollars for critical projects. These are not local tax dollars, they are revenues generated at a federal facility that would be authorized for reinvestment to address federal environmental responsibilities.
- House of Representatives Bill H.R. 1948, introduced by Representative Scott Peters, would enable the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) to accept funding from state, regional, and local partners to advance urgently needed sanitation and flood control projects.

These proposals are separate and distinct, but each would create additional tools to help protect the health and safety of our residents and coastlines for generations to come. This is more than just fixing pipes — it's about delivering clean water, safe air, and peace of mind for the families who have endured this crisis for too long.

Today's action recommends that the Board direct the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to express the County's support for both pieces of legislation, consistent with Board Policy M-2. I urge my colleagues to support this item and help us continue the fight to safeguard public health and our region's coastal environment.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)
VICE CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to express the County's support for State Senate Bill 10 and House of Representatives Bill 1948, consistent with Board Policy M-2.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This item advances equity by improving health and environmental conditions for working-class and immigrant communities in South San Diego County, who have long borne the brunt of cross-border pollution. Persistent beach closures, water contamination, and environmental degradation disproportionately harm residents, small businesses, and frontline workers. This item helps secure sustained investments to address these longstanding inequities.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This item advances sustainability by reducing sewage discharges into the Tijuana River Valley and Pacific Ocean, improving water quality, and protecting coastal ecosystems. Cleaner water supports public health, preserves marine habitats, and strengthens long-term climate resilience for San Diego County's communities and natural environment.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this recommendation. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING NEW TOOLS TO ADDRESS THE TIJUANA RIVER
SEWAGE CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

Beach closures and chronic pollution have severely harmed the region's coastal economy, reducing tourism, visitor spending, and local business activity. Long-term exposure to environmental hazards also undermines community health and economic vitality across San Diego County. This item supports efforts to protect key economic assets and promote sustainable growth.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The Tijuana River Valley has experienced decades of pollution from untreated sewage, solid waste, and sediment originating in Mexico and flowing into the United States. The ongoing contamination has caused significant public health threats, repeated beach closures, and environmental degradation, particularly impacting the communities of Imperial Beach, South San Diego, and Coronado.

In response, the County of San Diego, City of Imperial Beach, City of San Diego, and Port of San Diego have declared local states of emergency. Our region's Congressional Delegation has been instrumental in securing \$650 million in federal funding for capital improvements to the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) to address some of the most immediate infrastructure needs. However, historically underfunded operations and maintenance of the plant, combined with the scale of the ongoing crisis, require additional solutions.

State Senate Bill 10 (Padilla) would authorize SANDAG to allocate a portion of toll revenues generated from the soon-to-be-operational Otay Mesa East Port of Entry to fund sewage treatment, mitigation, and related public health protections in the region. This dedicated revenue stream could generate millions of dollars annually, creating an additional on-going source of funding to address the crisis.

House of Representatives Bill 1948 (Peters) would authorize the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) to accept funding from non-federal sources, including state, regional, and local agencies, to advance critical projects related to wastewater treatment and flood control.

These measures would expand the toolkit available to San Diego County and its regional partners to ensure the long-term success of cross-border pollution mitigation efforts, complement federal investments, and secure cleaner water, safer beaches, and healthier communities.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

This action supports the County of San Diego's 2025-2030 Strategic Plan, particularly the goals of promoting a healthy, safe, and thriving region, fostering sustainable environments, and improving community health outcomes. By addressing the public health and environmental impacts of the Tijuana River sewage crisis, this item also aligns with the County's Climate Action Plan and commitment to environmental justice. Specifically, this action furthers the goal

SUBJECT: SUPPORTING NEW TOOLS TO ADDRESS THE TIJUANA RIVER
SEWAGE CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

of protecting the public's health and well-being while addressing disparities in health and environmental outcomes for impacted communities.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Terra Lawson-Remer', with a stylized, cursive script.

TERRA LAWSON-REMER

Supervisor, Third District

ATTACHMENT(S)

N/A