



PALOMA AGUIRRE

**SUPERVISOR, FIRST DISTRICT
SAN DIEGO COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: September 9, 2025

18

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

ADOPT A RESOLUTION ENTITLED “A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO RELATING TO ADVOCACY FOR STATE FUNDING ALLOCATIONS TO ADDRESS THE TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY SEWAGE CRISIS” AND A-72 WAIVER (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

The Tijuana River sewage crisis has had profound environmental, economic, and public health impacts across multiple communities in South San Diego County, with over 100 billion gallons of sewage crossing the international border into our region through the Tijuana River since 2018.

The Board of Supervisors (Board) declared the water pollution crisis a state of emergency in June 2023. Harmful levels of bacteria in beach water originating from the Tijuana River have caused the closure of some South County beaches for over 1,300 consecutive days. The County of San Diego (County) has since made advocacy on the Tijuana River Valley a priority to increase investment and attention towards solving this crisis.

Proposition 4, a statewide bond measure authorizing the State to borrow \$10 billion for clean water efforts, fire prevention, stormwater management, and climate resilience, was passed by the voters during the November 2024 General Election. Proposition 4 directs \$50 million to be available to the State Water Resources Control Board for projects in the Tijuana River Valley and New River watersheds that will “address water quality problems arising in the California-Mexico cross-border rivers and coastal waters.” Today’s action would adopt a resolution requesting that the State Water Resources Control Board allocate the full \$50 million of Proposition 4 cross-border rivers funding to projects aimed at addressing the ongoing environmental and public health crises in the Tijuana River Valley.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

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1. Waive Board Policy A-72 Agenda and Related Process, Section 2.C.2.ii, which establishes required timelines for review when preparing a Board Letter.

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2. Adopt a Resolution entitled: “A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO RELATING TO ADVOCACY FOR STATE FUNDING ALLOCATIONS TO ADDRESS THE TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY POLLUTION CRISIS”
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to send a letter to the State Legislative Delegation requesting their support in advocacy to the State Water Resources Control Board for the allocation of \$50 million in Proposition 4 cross-border rivers funding to projects aimed at addressing the ongoing environmental and public health crises in the Tijuana River Valley
4. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to send a letter to the State Water Resources Control Board requesting allocation of the full \$50 million in Proposition 4 cross-border rivers funding to projects in the Tijuana River Valley
5. Direct CAO to include the following publications as attachments to the letters included in Recommendations 3 and 4:
 - Copy of the Resolution entitled “A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO RELATING TO ADVOCACY FOR STATE FUNDING ALLOCATIONS TO ADDRESS THE TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY POLLUTION CRISIS”;
 - a summary of the results of the Assessment of Chemical Exposures (ACE) survey as well as the full report;
 - a summary of the results of the Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER) survey as well as the full report;
 - the findings of the County of San Diego’s 2023 study on the Economic Impacts of Transboundary Pollution;
 - and the following academic publications:
 - Heavily polluted Tijuana River drives regional air quality crisis by Prather, Granados, et al.
 - Tijuana River Contamination from Urban Runoff and Sewage: A Public Health Crisis at the Border by Granados, Sant, et al.
 - Health Impacts in Residents Exposed to Tijuana River Pollution A Community-Based Assessment of Environmental and Public Health Risks in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region by Granados et al.
 - Low level exposure to hydrogen sulfide: a review of emissions, community exposure, health effects, and exposure guidelines by Batterman et al.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The communities closest to the San Diego International Border, including the communities of Imperial Beach, San Ysidro, Otay Mesa, and Tijuana River Valley are identified by SB 535 (2012) and CalEnviroScreen 4.0 as being Environmental Justice communities having high pollution burdens, elevated linguistic isolation, and poverty rates. The County of San Diego (County)

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remains committed to working with local, State, federal, and binational authorities to improve the quality of life for these communities and residents. By advocating for increased State funding to address the pollution crisis in the Tijuana River Valley, the County aligns with the efforts of local Environmental Justice communities to raise their concerns to various agencies and elevate the need for more investment to address the crisis and protect the local environment, economy, and public health.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This action aligns with the County of San Diego’s (County) Sustainability Goals: protect health and wellbeing and the environment. The proposed action contributes to the County’s Sustainability Goal No. 6 to protect the environment and promote our natural resources, diverse habitats, and cultivate a natural environment for residents, visitors, and future generations to enjoy.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with the request to adopt a resolution requesting State funding allocations for local projects in the Tijuana River Valley. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

Increased beach water closures and other sewage impacts have a direct effect on the surrounding community due to decreased tourism, patronage of local businesses, and opportunities for youth recreation and camps. Obtaining funding to address the Tijuana River Valley Pollution crisis will allow for the undertaking of projects to mitigate and eliminate these impacts.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

The Tijuana River Valley in South San Diego County continues to experience one of the most severe environmental disasters of our time. The combination of a rising population in the binational region and aging infrastructure, exacerbated by increased cross-border sewage and runoff flows and a lack of investment from both the federal and State governments, has allowed the pollution crisis to get worse over time. The impact of the pollution is felt in many ways across the San Diego region, from the health and well-being of thousands of local residents to local businesses that rely on tourism at nearby beaches.

The Board of Supervisors issued a Proclamation of Local Emergency in response to the water pollution crisis in June 2023. Since then, harmful levels of bacteria in beach water originating from the Tijuana River has caused the closure of some South County beaches for over 1,300 consecutive days. The County of San Diego (County) has since made advocacy on the Tijuana River Valley a priority to increase investment and attention towards solving this crisis. In response, the White House announced additional support for County efforts through the CASPER and ACE studies, Congress appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars to upgrade the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP), and the Government of Mexico began construction of a

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more robust treatment plant that has since resumed operation as of April 2025. The County will continue to meet with federal and State agencies to support the health and well-being of impacted communities and to discuss ways to address our nation’s most significant ongoing environmental and public health crises.

Proposition 4, a statewide bond measure authorizing the State to borrow \$10 billion for clean water efforts, fire prevention, stormwater management, and climate resilience, was passed by the California voters during the November 2024 General Election, garnering approximately 60% of the vote. Officially titled the “Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024,” Proposition 4 was placed on the ballot by the State Legislature, via Senate Bill 867 (Allen), following two years of significant budget deficits which caused California to scale back spending to address climate change impacts. The County proactively engaged with the State Legislature in 2024 to ensure the bond measure included funding for the Tijuana River Valley; the Board of Supervisors officially registered its support for Proposition 4 on October 8, 2024.

Notably for the San Diego Region, Proposition 4 directs \$50 million to be available to the State Water Board for projects that will “address water quality problems arising in the California-Mexico cross-border rivers and coastal waters.” Projects in the Tijuana River Valley watershed and New River watershed both qualify for this pot of funding, though the funding must first be disbursed to the State Water Board, which determines which projects will be prioritized for Proposition 4 funding, then sends that money to regional water boards for implementation. This process cannot move forward until the State Legislature passes a spending plan for the Bond, which has not yet taken place. Governor Newsom released a Proposition 4 spending plan earlier this year, directing much of the Bond’s climate funding to wildfire prevention projects, however, this plan was ultimately rejected by the Legislature to allow for adjustments reflecting the Legislature’s priorities. The Governor’s plan would have authorized \$9 million for Cross-Border Rivers in 2025-26, \$21 million in 2026-27, and \$20 million in the out-years. While we await State action on Proposition 4, interest groups have been advocating to State lawmakers to move forward with an expenditure plan for the entirety of the Bond measure as soon as possible. The County has been informing State lawmakers of the importance of maximizing Proposition 4 funding for Tijuana River Valley projects.

Regional stakeholders, including the County and other governments, have been actively collaborating with each other and with the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board to identify priority projects to fund through Proposition 4. The Regional Board has shared a list of priority projects with the State Water Board, emphasizing the need to fully fund Tijuana River Valley projects, though the State Water Board ultimately makes the decision on which projects to move forward with. County staff are working closely with the Regional Board to elevate additional projects in the Tijuana River Valley that can be leveraged to advocate for the full \$50 million.

Today’s action would elevate the need to fully fund efforts to address the Tijuana River Valley sewage crisis by adopting a resolution requesting the State Water Board to allocate the full \$50 million of Proposition 4 cross-border rivers funding to projects in the Tijuana River Valley.

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LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed actions support Sustainability and Equity initiatives in the County's 2025-30 Strategic Plan by combatting issues related to environmental justice, public health, and economic harm resulting from the decades long transboundary pollution environmental crisis.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paloma Aguirre', with a stylized flourish at the end.

PALOMA AGUIRRE
Supervisor, First District

ATTACHMENT(S)

Attachment A- A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO RELATING TO ADVOCACY FOR STATE FUNDING ALLOCATIONS TO ADDRESS THE TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY POLLUTION CRISIS