



CLINICAS DE SALUD DEL PUEBLO, INC.

"Our success is measured by the lives we change."

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March 10, 2015

LATE COMMENT

Jeanine Townsend, Clerk to the Board
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street, 24th Floor
Sacramento, CA 95814
commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov

Subject: Comment Letter: Salton Sea

Dear Madam Chair and Members of the Board:

On behalf of Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo, Inc., I am writing to express our support for the Imperial Irrigation District's petition regarding restoration of the Salton Sea. As the Board recognized in its Notice of Public Workshop, this issue is an urgent one of statewide importance. It is also a particularly important issue for the health of those people in and around the Imperial and Coachella valleys. It is the people in and near the Salton Sea who will bear the burden and experience the most direct health costs of a failure to restore the Salton Sea.

Clinicas de Salud del Pueblo, Inc. a 501(c)3 federally qualified health center, is interested in improving the health of residents of our Imperial and East Riverside County communities and is the only community health center serving this geographically isolated and medically underserved area. We serve 52,000 residents every year, 5% of whom have asthma and nearly 20% of whom have heart disease or hypertension, conditions that may be exacerbated by poor air quality. In recent years, we have noticed that the asthma rates in Imperial County have increased, particularly the rates of young people 0-17 years of age with asthma seeking urgent care in the emergency department. In analyzing the emergency department utilization rates of youth with asthma for the year 2012 by zip code, we found that youth living in Brawley (227.5), El Centro (167) and Calipatria (148.7) had the highest, second highest and third highest numbers per 10,000. Additionally we found that we served significantly more children with asthma at our El Centro (826) and Brawley (347) clinics in 2013 as compared to Calexico (122.) This has signaled to us that environmental conditions or triggers may be worse in our north end areas and require special attention. It also makes us extremely concerned for the health trajectory of these children. Children with asthma do not, generally, outgrow it and if they are developing it at a young age and having serious complications, they may have a lower quality of life (on all levels – health, social, economic) as they get older and they may be a larger burden on our local healthcare system that is already under resourced.

The health of the people in the Imperial and Coachella valleys will be critically affected from the State's failure to restore the Salton Sea. That is the harsh reality facing our region.



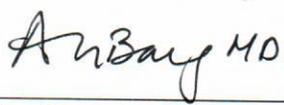
The QSA was supposed to prevent this from happening. As IID explained in its petition, it has long been recognized that water transfers out of the Imperial Valley would be a major threat to the Salton Sea and the Imperial and Coachella valleys. These concerns almost derailed the entire QSA, but the agreements were signed after the State of California promised to restore the Sea. This promise was a matter of basic fairness and the QSA would not have been signed without it. The water transfers benefit the entire State, so the Legislature agreed that the entire State would bear the cost of addressing the effects of the transfers on the Salton Sea. It is fundamentally wrong for the residents of the Imperial and Coachella valleys—areas which already face significant public-health challenges—to be forced to bear the consequences of California’s effort to reduce its usage of Colorado River water.

Almost no progress has been made on restoration more than a decade later. It is time for action. Several studies in recent years have confirmed that restoration is both feasible and necessary to protect the health and well-being of residents and communities around the Salton Sea. The Board should use its power to bring all necessary parties together to design, implement, and fund a restoration plan that will create a smaller, sustainable Sea and preserve a bright future for the Imperial and Coachella valleys.

For the sake of health in the Salton Sea region, we call upon the Board to approve IID’s petition. The Board, the State, IID, and all other interested parties should cooperate to ensure that the Sea is restored before it is too late. We ask the Board to convene a collaborative process among these parties that will identify a specific restoration plan that can be implemented and funded in time to avert the looming crisis threatening our region and the entire State.

Sincerely,


Yvonne Bell, Chief Executive Officer


Afshan N. Baig, Chief Medical Officer

cc: Stephen W. Benson, Board President, Imperial Irrigation District
Ryan E. Kelley, Chairman of the Board, County of Imperial