

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 30, 2017

The Honorable Ken Calvert
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on the Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
B-308 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Betty McCollum
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on the Interior,
Environment, and Related Agencies
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Calvert and Ranking Member McCollum:

We write in strong support of the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) U.S. - Mexico's border programs, and respectfully request you include \$5 million in funding for the U.S. - Mexico Border Water Infrastructure Program in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2018 Interior, Environment and Related Agencies appropriations bill. Additionally, we urge you to provide robust funding for the EPA's Office of International and Tribal Affairs which supports vital programs such as the Border 2020 environmental program and other related projects.

We recently marked the 30th anniversary of the La Paz Agreement which defines the EPA's US-Mexico Border work to advance our priorities of protecting the environment and public health along the US-Mexico Border. EPA addresses these trans-boundary issues through both the US-Mexico Border water infrastructure program and the US-Mexico Border 2020 environmental program.

The two thousand mile border between the United States and Mexico is one of the most complex and dynamic regions in the world, with a growing need to address trans-border environmental issues. This region accounts for three of the ten poorest counties in the U.S., with an unemployment rate 250-300 percent higher than the rest of the United States. Additionally, 26 U.S. federally recognized Native American tribes are located in the U.S.-Mexico border region. The La Paz Agreement and the adoption of the Border 2012 program in 2003 have gone a long way to protect and improve the health and environmental conditions along a border that extends from the Gulf of Mexico to the Pacific Ocean. Building on the successes of the Border 2012 program, the Border 2020 program lays out a roadmap for continued environmental cooperation over the next eight years.

The Border 2020 Program addresses border-wide air pollution, access to clean and safe water, material and waste management, emergency preparedness, and compliance assurance. Projects funded address the greatest environmental health issues in the areas of greatest need in the US and the trans-boundary issues along Mexico's US border. The US-Mexico Border 2012 Program improved access to actionable information to increase compliance with water and air quality

standards; reduced contamination through cleanup and proper disposal of 560 tons of used electronics and more than 12 million scrap tires from the largest tire piles; increased joint readiness for environmental response through enhanced training and equipment exchanges; and improved enforcement through coordinated communication and training.

The EPA's Border Water Infrastructure Program is unique among federal funding programs. It is the only federal program that can fund projects on both sides of the border, with all projects benefiting communities on the U.S. side of the border. The EPA investments in these wastewater projects are protecting public health from waterborne diseases and have been a key factor in significant water quality improvements in U.S. waterbodies, such as the Rio Grande (Texas and New Mexico), Santa Cruz River (Arizona), New River (California), and Tijuana River and Pacific Ocean (California). Since the program began in 1997, it has provided over 60,000 border homes with access to safe drinking water and more than 550,000 homes with adequate wastewater collection and treatment services. Most border communities have received access to these services for the first time. The program's funding has made significant progress addressing the public health and environmental impact of inadequate drinking water and wastewater infrastructure along the US-Mexico border.

We appreciate your consideration and strongly urge the Committee to provide adequate funding for the EPA's US- Mexico's border programs at the requested amount. Underserved border communities are still challenged by existing infrastructure gaps and would greatly benefit by continued support for these programs.

Sincerely,



Rep. Juan Vargas
Member of Congress



Rep. Scott H. Peters
Member of Congress



Rep. Susan A. Davis
Member of Congress



Rep. Filemon Vela
Member of Congress



Rep. Vicente Gonzalez
Member of Congress