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**AJR-16 Tijuana River: transboundary flow pollution.** (2025-2026)

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CALIFORNIA LEGISLATURE— 2025–2026 REGULAR SESSION

**ASSEMBLY JOINT RESOLUTION**

**NO. 16**

**Introduced by Assembly Members Alvarez and Jeff Gonzalez  
(Principal coauthor: Senator Padilla)**

**June 19, 2025**

Relative to the Tijuana River.

**LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST**

AJR 16, as introduced, Alvarez. Tijuana River: transboundary flow pollution.

This measure would urge the United States Congress and the President of the United States to fully fund the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution for the Tijuana River due to the ongoing impacts on public health, the environment, and the local economy caused by transboundary flow pollution. The measure would urge the United States Congress and the President of the United States to take additional specified actions to address ongoing transboundary flow pollution.

Fiscal Committee: no

WHEREAS, The Tijuana River flows from east to west from Mexico into California and drains into the Pacific Ocean through the Tijuana River Estuary, and for decades has experienced an increased discharge of trash, sediment, and wastewater generated in Mexico that, as a result of sewage infrastructure inadequacies, has created recurring and worsening pollution problems for the County of San Diego and the southern California coastline; and

WHEREAS, The extent of the transboundary flow pollution has been studied for decades and 2017 research by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography attributed 34,000 annual illnesses to water quality pollution along the City of Imperial Beach coastline in the County of San Diego, and linked up to 76 percent of bacteria in the City of Imperial Beach's air to transboundary flow pollution; and

WHEREAS, Data from medical clinics in the City of Imperial Beach shows a significant increase in cases of diarrhea and other intestinal problems during significant transboundary flow pollution events; and

WHEREAS, The City of San Diego has declared a continued state of emergency since 1993 as a result of the escalated discharge of raw sewage from the City of Tijuana, Mexico, that has caused numerous health problems, including headaches,

rashes, infections, and breathing problems; and

WHEREAS, The City of Imperial Beach has declared a continued state of emergency since 2017 as a result of the escalated discharge of raw sewage from the City of Tijuana, Mexico, that has caused numerous health problems and significant beach closure days at the City of Imperial Beach, including 101 days in 2018, 243 days in 2019, 295 days in 2020, and 246 days in 2021, and the southernmost portion of the Imperial Beach shoreline has been closed since December 8, 2021; and

WHEREAS, The beach closures have had a direct effect on the surrounding communities due to decreased tourism, patronage of local businesses, and opportunities for youth recreation and camps, and are negatively affecting property values; and

WHEREAS, The San Diego County Air Pollution Control District has deployed air monitors in the communities surrounding the Tijuana River Valley that have recorded levels of hydrogen sulfide above standards set by the United States Environmental Protection Agency; and

WHEREAS, On June 27, 2023, the County of San Diego declared a local emergency due to the public health, environmental, and economic impacts of the transboundary flow pollution disaster; and

WHEREAS, In October 2024, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the County of San Diego completed the Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response survey that found that the ongoing sewage crisis is disrupting the lives of the population surveyed in south County of San Diego, including, among other things, by decreasing outdoor activities for more than 70 percent of the population; and

WHEREAS, On August 30, 2018, the Legislature approved Senate Joint Resolution 22 to urge the federal government to take immediate action to adequately address transboundary flow pollution in the Tijuana River Valley; and

WHEREAS, Former California Attorney General Xavier Becerra initiated a lawsuit against the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) that led to the USIBWC committing to comply with the Clean Water Act of 1977 (33 U.S.C. Sec. 1251 et seq.) and an appropriation of \$300,000,000 through the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement to address transboundary flow pollution; and

WHEREAS, Since October 2018, the USIBWC has documented the entry of over 200 billion gallons of toxic effluent into the United States through the Tijuana River; and

WHEREAS, The USIBWC has failed to maintain and operate the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant by allocating only \$4,000,000 of the estimated \$40,000,000 that was required for maintenance during the period from 2011 to 2021, inclusive; and

WHEREAS, The USIBWC's failure to respond is a clear violation of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1977 (33 U.S.C. Sec. 1251 et seq.) and the federal Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976 (42 U.S.C. Sec. 6901 et seq.) that has endangered the lives of the people of California and threatened the environmental health and viability of the Tijuana River Valley and its diverse and unique potential as an ecological, recreational, cultural, and educational jewel of the State of California for decades; and

WHEREAS, Urgent funding and commitments are needed to completely implement the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution for the Tijuana River and to address deferred maintenance needs for existing USIBWC infrastructure in order to bring the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant into compliance with the Clean Water Act of 1977 (33 U.S.C. Sec. 1251 et seq.); and

WHEREAS, The New River, with headwaters that originate about 15 miles south of the City of Mexicali, Baja California, Mexico, crosses the international boundary at the City of Calexico, travels 60 miles through the County of Imperial, and empties into the Salton Sea, and has been recognized as one of the most polluted rivers in the nation; and

WHEREAS, The State of California Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board has monitored the water quality of the New River since 1975 and has detected pollution by bacteria, silt, nutrients including nitrate and phosphate, pesticides, and trash; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature has passed legislation and appropriated moneys to reduce transboundary flow pollution from the Tijuana River and the New River; and

WHEREAS, The New River's pollution problem has been recognized since the 1940s, and is being exacerbated by the continued growth of urban areas, industry, and agriculture on both sides of the United States-Mexico border; and

WHEREAS, The community surrounding the New River in the City of Calexico is predominantly Latino and ranks in the 92nd percentile for pollution burden and the 100th percentile for impaired water bodies according to CalEnviroScreen, an

environmental justice mapping tool of the California Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly and the Senate of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature urges the United States Congress and President Donald J. Trump to fully fund the United States Environmental Protection Agency's Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution for the Tijuana River due to the ongoing impacts on public health, the environment, and the local economy caused by transboundary flow pollution; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature urges President Donald J. Trump to allow all relevant agencies to provide financial and technical support to the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the USIBWC regarding the implementation of infrastructure solutions, including, but not limited to, the projects agreed to in the USIBWC Minute No. 328; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature urges President Donald J. Trump to declare a national emergency due to the ongoing impacts on public health, the environment, and the local economy caused by transboundary flow pollution in the Tijuana River Valley; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature urges President Donald J. Trump and the United States Congress to include sufficient ongoing operation and maintenance funding for the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant in future federal budgets; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature hereby reinforces its commitment to Section 4 of Article X of the California Constitution and the California Coastal Act of 1976 (Division 20 (commencing with Section 30000) of the Public Resources Code), which both guarantee maximum public access to the coast and navigable waters, and strongly urges the federal government to take necessary action to end the beach closures in the City of Imperial Beach that have lasted for more than 1,270 consecutive days; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature urges the United States Congress and President Donald J. Trump to approve funding to address the ongoing transboundary flow pollution that is impacting the New River; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the President and Vice President of the United States, to the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, to the Majority Leader of the United States Senate, to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States, to the Commissioner of the USIBWC, to the Governor, to the California Attorney General, and to the author for appropriate distribution.