



April 11, 2023

The Honorable Eduardo Garcia
California State Assembly
1021 O Street, Suite 8120
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Stephen Padilla
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 6640
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Budget Support for Innovative Pilot Project

Dear Assembly Member Garcia and Senator Padilla,

On behalf of the City of Coachella, we write to respectfully urge you to request a \$500,000 appropriation through the 2023-2024 State Budget to help the city finance a pilot demonstration project on the efficacy of stannous chloride to lower levels of hexavalent chromium 6 (Chromium-6) in the city's drinking water. With the State Water Resources Control Board ("Water Board") expected to issue a new chromium-6 drinking water standard later this year, a pilot study demonstrating the efficacy of stannous chloride is the city's only viable path at being able to afford the cost of complying with the forthcoming chromium-6 standard.

Located in the eastern Coachella Valley in Riverside County, the City of Coachella is a working-class community of 45,000 residents that operates its own water system. While the City is located near some of the most exclusive real estate and recreational destinations in the country—golf clubs, resort hotels, gated communities—our residents often struggle to afford basic services. The average median household income is \$35,000, and like the rest of the Coachella Valley, our groundwater is contaminated with naturally occurring chromium-6 which results from the valley's geology, and that has been present in the groundwater since before the valley was developed.

In 2022, the Water Board issued a draft drinking water standard for chromium-6 at a Maximum Contaminant Level (MCL) of 10 parts per billion, mirroring the Water Board's 2014 chromium-6 MCL. The 2014 chromium-6 MCL was invalidated by the courts in 2017, but not before the city spent \$400,000 on design plans to build a strong base anion exchange system to reduce chromium-6 from its drinking water at a cost of \$36.2 million to construct. Once passed to the city's water users, the cost of the project would have increased average customer bills to \$96.36 per month, an over 120% increase in water rates per customer over a five-year period. The increase would have pushed the city's affordability index to 4.4% of Median Household Income (MHI), almost three times higher than the 1.5% MHI threshold used by the state to determine water affordability.



In the greater Coachella Valley, the Coachella Valley Water District (the “district”) was facing a similarly exorbitant cost scenario to comply with the 2014 chromium-6 MCL. The district had designed plans to build a conventional ion exchange treatment system consisting of buildings at 29 well sites and a central facility for regenerating the resin used in the treatment process at a cost of \$250 million to construct. However, just as construction was set to begin, testing revealed stannous chloride, an approved drinking water additive used to protect water pipes from corrosion, could safely and cost effectively lower levels of chromium-6 in its water system. In response, the district temporarily halted construction of the ion exchange system and launched a pilot study to evaluate the feasibility and effectiveness of using stannous chloride to reduce levels of chromium-6 at a district well in Palm Desert. The pilot confirmed the efficacy of stannous chloride. The district then authorized a full-scale demonstration project of its water system serving Indio Hills, Sky Valley and areas in and around Desert Hot Springs. Again, the results of the study showed stannous chloride could cost effectively reduce chromium-6 to ten parts per billion and below, positioning the district to meet any forthcoming chromium-6 MCL at a fraction of the cost of the conventional ion exchange methods prescribed by the state.

Because the State Water Board requires the completion of a pilot study before it will allow alternate chromium-6 treatment technologies like stannous chloride, the completion of a pilot study is the city’s only viable path toward being able to meet the forthcoming chromium-6 MCL. Ultimately, our residents deserve access to safe and affordable drinking water, but having already spent \$400,000 on plans to comply with the 2014 chromium-6 MCL; we need the state’s help to demonstrate the efficacy of stannous chloride to reduce chromium-6 in our drinking water.

We thank you for your consideration of this modest but important investment of \$500,000 to ensure our residents have access to the affordable and clean drinking water they deserve, but for too long have lacked.

Respectfully,

Dr. Gabriel Martin
City Manager