

Inland Action Federal Legislative Issues 2025 - Detail

Economic Development Issues

Support S. 1157 (Cantwell) and H.R. 3238 (LaHood) – Affordable Housing Credit and Improvement Act (AHCIA). The Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act (AHCIA) is a comprehensive, bipartisan bill that seeks to expand and strengthen the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program. The Tax Credit program is currently the most successful tool for the development and preservation of affordable housing. The AHCIA builds on the strengths of that program by increasing states' ability to maximize the potential leveraging of those funds and simplifying and streamlining the process.

The Inland Empire is one of the fastest growing metropolitan regions in the nation. Population growth brings economic potential, but that potential will only be realized if new residents can find affordable housing. The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) has determined that for the 2021-2029 planning period, the Current Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) for the Inland Empire require 305,000 housing units across the two inland counties.

The AHCIA will increase allocations of credits, lower the threshold for Private Activity Bonds, and simplify and align rules with other housing funding programs. This legislation will also make changes to the program to allow it to better serve rural, Native American, high-poverty, and high cost of living communities while codifying specific uses for veterans and victims of domestic violence. The goal is a program that maximizes housing development to help address the nationwide housing crisis. It is also important to recognize the economic gains from job creation and additional economic growth due to increased investment through tax-credit vehicles.

The solution to developing enough housing to meet those goals will involve work on a number of fronts by a broad coalition of stakeholders. Passing the AHCIA is the single most important step Congress can take to address the region's affordable housing needs.

Extend the tax cuts and benefits of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act for small business owners and middle- and low-income families. In 2017, President Trump signed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. The Act lowered taxes on corporations and individuals through a variety of rate and deduction amount changes that were beneficial to small business owners and families in the Inland Empire. The Act, among other things, lowered the marginal tax rate on income for corporations and individuals, increased the standard deduction and family tax credits, allowed for a greater deduction on pass-through income (the primary method small businesses recognize income), and increased the estate tax exemption threshold.

If no action is taken by the end of 2025, only the benefits for corporations will remain in place. The individual tax rates will increase and the changes to the standard deduction and other family tax credits, as well as the pass-through exemption provision and the increase in the estate tax exemption will sunset. Inland Empire families already face high costs of goods. These high costs and the projections of increased inflation make now an important time to protect the Inland Empire small business owners and middle- and low-income families from increases in taxes. The residents of the Inland Empire can't afford to take home less money.

Inland Action urges our delegation to work together to extend the tax cuts and benefits of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act for small business owners and middle- and low-income families in the Inland Empire.

Education Issues

Support the Federal funding of Education. Centralized education at the federal level promotes student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. Consistent education for all is vital for ensuring all students have access to a quality education and for protecting the rights of students and educators. Additionally, education at a federal level protects the civil rights of students and assists with the implementation of funds designed to provide individual support for students with disabilities.

Federal programs include those within ESSA Title I, II, III, and IV, which are vital in supporting students from low-income backgrounds, developing and training educators, and providing resources for English learners alongside other traditionally underserved students.

As California wrestles with critical issues in its public education system, there are deeper concerns reflected in the Inland Empire with significant disparity between Riverside and San Bernardino counties and other Southern California counties. Examples include eligibility for admission into the University of California and California State University systems where Inland Empire high school students trail behind Los Angeles and Orange County students. Several factors including socioeconomic disparities and resources limitations in our schools exist. Our African American and Hispanic students trail behind their Asian and Caucasian counterparts.

The Inland Empire includes areas with high poverty rates and communities that educational institutions have historically underserved. Schools in these areas often wrestle with insufficient funding, a shortage of qualified teachers, as well as a shortage of school and college counselors.

Inland Action is aligned with state objectives to elevate our students' academic trajectories. We recognize that the region's ability to cultivate a competitive workforce lies in improving student academic performance. Education will continue to become more and more crucial for career success. Without it students will face fewer opportunities for economic advancement. This will adversely impact our students, their families and constrain the Inland Empire's economic diversification and development. Supporting the Federal funding of Education will maintain and improve our efforts to improve education and elevate economic potential across the Inland Empire.

Support action to double the maximum Pell Grant to \$13,000. Doubling the maximum Pell Grant award and indexing it to inflation ensures that all students who wish to attend higher education can afford to do so and protects the Pell Grant from inflationary pressures that have eroded the grant's purchasing power over time. This increase would substantially contribute to students' overall aid packages and will help sustain students' basic needs – including housing and food security, health care, and access to childcare – and promote on-time graduation among the most vulnerable student populations.

Inland Empire educational institutions are preparing an educated and skilled workforce for the Inland Empire. Inland Action urges support for legislation and programs that increase equitable access to higher education and help produce more skilled college graduates to meet workforce

needs and advance the region’s economy. While progress has been made to support our most vulnerable students, Inland Action supports further action to double the maximum Pell Grant Award to allow more Inland Empire students to complete college and earn degrees more quickly.

The Inland Empire, which suffers from one of the lowest baccalaureate degree attainment rates in the nation for metropolitan areas of one million or more residents, as well as one of the highest poverty rates, needs more skilled and educated workers to advance the region’s economy. The federal Pell Grant program continues to be one of the best investments in our future, opening the door to a college degree and upward mobility to millions of students. More than 67,000 low- to moderate-income students currently attending Inland Empire community colleges, public, and private universities rely on Pell Grants to complete their degrees.

Pell Grants are the cornerstone of financial aid, targeting federal resources to students most in need of support to access and afford a college education. Over the life of the federal Pell Grant program over 80 million students have had the opportunity to pursue higher learning and achieve their full potential. Over seven million students, or about 40% of undergraduates, receive a Pell Grant each year, including more than 2.5 million students at public four-year institutions.

Pell Grants are targeted at students with clear financial need: approximately three-fourths of all Pell Grant dollars are awarded to students with a family income below \$30,000. For many students, Pell Grants make the difference between being able to afford college or not. But over the years the size of the grant has not kept pace with the costs of attending college. By increasing the maximum Pell Grant, students will be less inclined to take out loans and more likely to graduate without a mountain of debt.

Inland Action strongly believes that all Americans, regardless of their family income, should be able to pursue a college degree if they so choose and that family income should not be a barrier. Pell Grants are central to this goal.

Pell Grant Data for Inland Empire University Students				
University Name	# of Students Receiving Pell Grants	% of Enrollment Receiving Pell Grants	Total Dollars	Amount per Student
Cal State University, San Bernardino	9,732	58%	\$50,806,791	\$5,221
University of CA, Riverside	11,306	46%	\$66,666,738	\$5,897
University of Redlands	799	36%	\$4,451,318	\$5,571
Loma Linda Univ	421	40%	\$2,092,008	\$4,969
Cal Baptist Univ	3,368	42%	\$17,342,368	\$5,149
Univ of La Verne	1,559	48%	\$7,693,737	\$4,935
La Sierra Univ	598	49%	\$3,088,493	\$5,165
San Bernardino Comm College Dist	5,231	19%	\$20,769,848	\$3,971
Riverside Comm College District	14,421	27%	\$56,306,120	\$3,904

Source: nces.ed.gov via IPEDS data (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System)

Support the \$80 million to help institutions provide affordable childcare for parents with low incomes through the Child Care Access Means Parents in Schools (CCAMPIS) program.

This competitive grant program supports the participation of parents with low incomes in postsecondary education through campus-based childcare services. Grants made to institutions of higher education must be used to supplement childcare services or start a new program, not to supplant funds for current childcare services. The U.S. Department of Education administers the program, which is authorized by the Higher Education Act.

CCAMPIS benefits include subsidizing care for children at day camps, after-school programs, or existing childcare programs or paying for licensed childcare of a parent's choice. Other benefits include assistance campus emergency resources, faculty tutoring and mentoring, campus mental health services, community resources and financial aid.

CCAMPIS goals strive to support students who are single parents, increase the quality of campus-based childcare for infants and toddlers, provide wrap-around services for low-income parents in post-secondary education and help colleges maintain the capacity to train early care and education teachers.

Support \$2.3 billion in career and technical training and adult education to support the long-term sustainability of our nation's skilled workforce, including for state grants. Expanding access to career training programs through investments in community colleges aids one of our Inland Empire objectives which is to increase our skilled workforce.

A skilled workforce is critical for both a strong Inland Empire and a strong Inland Empire economy. The Inland Empire is one of the fastest growing regions of California. This growth will create job opportunities for a workforce prepared to seize upon them. Today, most good jobs – those that provide a living wage – require some form of career-connected postsecondary education and training.

By 2027, 70% of jobs will require education or training beyond high school. The Inland Empire must dramatically increase the number of citizens who possess a postsecondary education credential, and we must connect our education and workforce systems to expand and create new opportunities for all students to engage in innovative, promising, and equitable pathways that propel them towards rewarding futures. Ideally every student has an on-ramp to post-secondary education and training that can lead to securing in-demand jobs right at home in the Inland Empire.

Funds would support increased integration and alignment of the last two years of high school and the first two years of postsecondary education to improve postsecondary and career outcomes for all students, including students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

At Inland Action we recognize the importance of and support Adult Education programs that help increase the number of adults who have the basic literacy and numeracy skills required to participate successfully in workforce education and training programs, including meeting the basic entrance requirements of apprenticeship programs.

Maintain current funding for Minority Serving Institutions (MSI). Minority Serving Institution funding is essential in a region as diverse as the Inland Empire. This funding supports numerous Inland Empire organizations in their efforts to address equity gaps and improve financial stability of our diverse populace.

Minority Serving Institutions benefit our students, our communities and as a result benefit economies across the Inland Empire. This funding supports academic success, leading to higher graduations rates and growth in social and education skills. This growth in skills helps to elevate economic and social mobility of students, benefiting our local communities and economies. This is especially helpful for some of the Inland Empire's poorer and more rural communities.

The Inland Empire's population is now majority Latino, and the role of Hispanic Serving Institutions is very important. These institutions play crucial roles in educating a diverse body of students, including 67% of Hispanic college students, and contribute significantly to the STEM workforce.

Inland Action supports increased investments in programs for Minority Serving Institutions. In the Inland Empire, all the public institutions within San Bernardino and Riverside counties have met the federal criteria for a Hispanic-Serving Institution. The University of Redlands is also a federally designated Hispanic-Serving Institution. The University of California, Riverside has also met the criteria for an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution.

Environment Issues

Support for federal legislative and funding efforts to mitigate and prevent wildfires.

Support for Fix Our Forests Act of 2024 H.R. 8790 (Westerman/Peters). This bipartisan bill would improve forest health, increase resiliency to catastrophic fires, and protect communities by expediting environmental review processes associated with forest projects, and would reduce frivolous lawsuits. The bill directly reverses a Ninth Circuit decision (Cottonwood) thereby allowing for a single endangered species consultation for projects with on-the-ground impacts at the project level only rather than at the plan level also. The bill also adjusts injunction standards requiring litigation to be brought quickly and requiring plaintiffs to show they are likely to succeed on the merits of the case. The bill would also increase categorical exclusions under NEPA and expand authorizations for forest management, allowing more projects to move quickly through the environmental review process. Finally, the bill also leverages partnerships by allowing extended stewardship contracts with private partners and making improvements to the Good Neighbor Authority program which allows the Forest Service to enter into agreements with state and tribal entities on projects.

Support for Community Protection and Wildfire Resilience Act H.R. 9760 (Obernolte/Huffman).

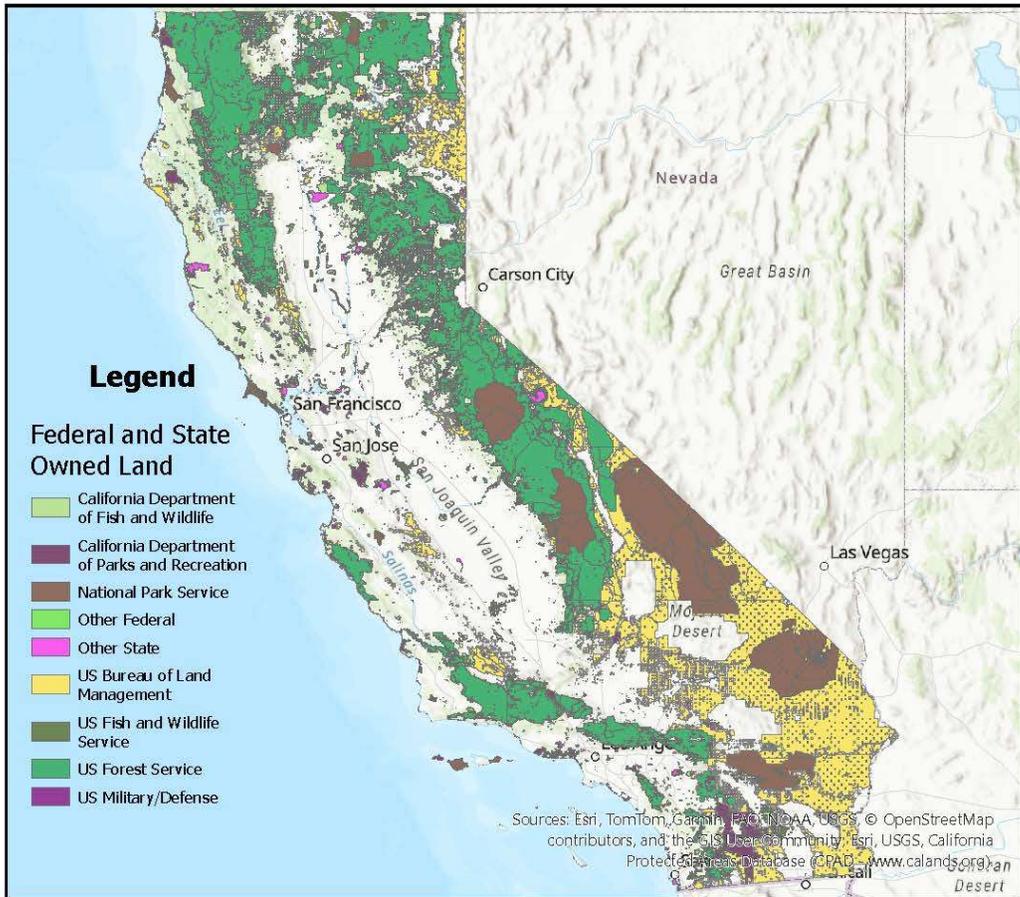
This bipartisan bill will invest \$1 billion per year in planning and coordination for wildfire response, grants for planning, updating hazard maps, addressing impediments to radio communications across departments, and allowing for structure hardening to be covered under existing wildfire protection programs.

Support for package of Senate Bills co-sponsored by Senator Padilla addressing wildfire.

In the past several months, Senator Padilla has co-sponsored a bi-partisan package of bills to address wildfire mitigation and prevention. The package includes the Wildfire Emergency Act (which would authorize various funding and pilot programs to address wildfires), the Fire-Safe Electrical Corridors Act (which would streamline removal of trees near power lines), the Disaster Mitigation and Tax Parity Act (which would incentivize homeowners to protect their homes by establishing a tax exemption on payments from state programs), the Wildland Firefighter Paycheck Protection Act (which would extend temporary increases for wildland firefighter pay and provide

for additional supplements for prolonged fire incidents), and the Fire Suppression and Response Funding Assurance Act (which would allow funding from the Fire Management Assistance Grant Program to be used for pre-deployment of local assets and adjusting the permitted federal cost share allowing the flexibility to cover more).

California Public Lands



Total: 46,941,336 acres

Agency Level	Frequency	Sum Acres
Federal	603	44,013,042
State	1232	2,928,294

Name: Lands Protected for Open Space - CPAD
 Description: The California Protected Areas Database (CPAD) contains data on lands owned in fee by governments, non-profits and some private entities that are protected for open space purposes. Data includes all such areas in California, from small urban parks to large national parks and forests, mostly aligned to assessor parcel boundaries. Data is collected by Holdings (parcels) which are aggregated to Units (commonly named areas within a county) and Super Units (commonly named areas generally). Copyright Text: California Protected Areas Database (CPAD - www.calands.org).

Support for Funding for Continued Management of the Salton Sea. The Salton Sea is located in Riverside County, yet few projects in our region come anywhere near the Salton Sea in terms of the potential for calamity or, conversely, enormous gain.

The Salton Sea is impacted by rising salinity, as well as changes in runoff from irrigated agriculture (supplied by Colorado River water). Reduced water flows to the Sea could result in the exposure of nearly 100 square miles of dry lakebed, resulting in diminished habitat, significant air quality problems, and a damaged economy.

A key issue at the Salton Sea is exposure of previously submerged lakebed, known as playa, as the lake surface shrinks. This playa exposure is subject to wind erosion and can be a source of fine airborne dust smaller than 10 micrometers, known as particulate matter 10, or PM10; as well as a source of PM 2.5. The dust is a significant health hazard and can contribute to respiratory illness in humans. It can also damage agricultural crops and wildlife and harm the region's tourism industry. Areas downwind from the Sea are already suffering from severe non-attainment for PM10 under the Clean Air Act. These areas suffer the highest rates of childhood asthma in California, with emergency room admissions for children under four years of age roughly twice the State average. In the near future, tens of millions of citizens downwind from the Sea could be impacted by dust blown from the playa into densely urbanized areas throughout Southern California.

In recent years, local, State, tribal, and federal governments have achieved significant progress in addressing the long-term management of the Salton Sea. These efforts have resulted in the development of the Salton Sea Funding and Feasibility Action Plan, a living document and framework for the future management of the Salton Sea, and Phase I of the Salton Sea Management Program 10-Year Plan, which guides investments at the Salton Sea in line with an MOU between the United States Department of the Interior and the California Natural Resources Agency. Current efforts are designed to address playa exposure by developing habitat or dust suppression projects on exposed playa.

With a plan in place, funding generally available to projects through the 2018 Farm Bill at the federal level, and through the passage of Proposition 68 at the State level, it is critical that funding be delivered to these projects in a timely and efficient manner. At the federal level, the following steps are suggested:

- Support action by federal agencies, consistent with the MOU implementing E.O. 13807. Specifically, Inland Action encourages: (1) the Department of Agriculture to ensure conservation funding and funding related to air quality concerns (connected to agricultural operations) be directed to Salton Sea projects; (2) the Army Corp of Engineers appropriate available monies for Salton Sea revitalization and support the Tribal Partnership Program; and (3) the Bureau of Reclamation to continue its engagement with Salton Sea partners and ensure funds are directed to habitat restoration and air quality management projects in the Salton Sea.

In addition to the foregoing, Inland Action wishes to express its appreciation for the Inflation Reduction Act, which enabled the Bureau of Reclamation to enter into an agreement with the Imperial Irrigation District and the Coachella Valley Water District to accelerate up to \$250 million in investments to support Salton Sea efforts. We encourage legislators to push further reclamation efforts to fund research and development projects at the Salton Sea and to ensure reclamation requests receive adequate funding for the Salton Sea in future budgets.

Support for Increased Funding for Water Supply, Water Quality, and Water Storage Projects through:

Support for permitting the Delta Conveyance Project. Water reliability is a vital issue for inland Southern California, including for major local State water contractors such as the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, San Bernardino Valley Municipal Water District, and Mojave Water Agency. Inland Action supports upgrading the State's infrastructure to improve conveyance in the Delta and ensure more reliable long-term water deliveries for the California State Water Project (SWP), which provides 30% of Southern California's water. Inland Action also supports continued federal funding for scientific research and habitation restoration in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to advance ecosystem improvements in support of California's coequal goals of water supply reliability and Delta ecosystem restoration.

On December 21, 2023, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) approved the Delta Conveyance Project and certified the Environmental Impact Report (EIR). DWR selected the Bethany Reservoir Alignment, which Inland Action had previously advocated because it appears to have the best approach to taking advantage of the high-water flows that have been experienced in recent years. Under current conditions with the southern intake, there is not any opportunity to take advantage of high flows during Winter and Spring. Recent flood events could not only have been mitigated by the proposed intakes, but significant volumes of water could have been recovered.

Over 20 million people in California depend on the SWP for drinking water. The health of the Delta and the sustainability of the SWP are greatly enhanced by this project. There will be impacts of the construction of a project of this magnitude, but they are significantly outweighed by the benefits.

Inland Action supports the project and asks that federal legislators do anything in their power to keep the project moving forward. For example, we ask that legislators maintain pressure on federal agencies and departments to request sufficient appropriations and to process necessary permits and authorizations in a timely and efficient manner (including, for example, under the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, and National Historic Preservation Act). Failure to move forward on this project would have devastating economic and environmental consequences to the entire State.

Funding for Monitoring and Remediation – PFAS. Ensuring safe drinking water is a fundamental requirement for healthy communities and economies. With growing concerns about the presence in some water supplies of a family of chemicals known as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), water agencies are working to ensure inland Southern California has a safe and reliable drinking water supply. Inland Action supports administrative and legislative actions to secure funding to help public water agencies defray the cost of monitoring and/or remediation of constituents (including PFAS) in drinking water supplies, including full cost-recovery by drinking water and wastewater providers.

Inland Action appreciates Congress's willingness to provide funding to address PFAS and other emerging contaminants (the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, for example) and appreciates the EPA's work to date on the PFAS issue (particularly, the PFAS Strategic Roadmap). *We do, however, want to continue to urge caution in legislating in this emerging field.* There are no doubt areas where legislation is required to pave the way for good science and regulation; e.g., addressing

requirements for PFAS in firefighting foam. However, a rush to legislate in this increasingly “popular” area, without letting the science lead the way, could easily result in conflicting and confusing statutory commands and additional burdens for local agencies and businesses.

Inland Action supports legislation that accomplishes the above goals while protecting public water and wastewater agencies (and, therefore, their ratepayers) from third-party liability associated with new standards.

Enhance Reliability of Long-Term Supplies, Storage and Drought Resiliency for California. Diverse sources of water supplies, increased water storage capacity, and enhanced resilience to drought are high priorities to maintain and grow California’s economy. Inland Action supports continued actions to implement measures that improve California’s water reliability and drought preparedness. Specifically, Inland Action wishes to express its support for continued investment in water projects including investments in drinking water, wastewater, water reuse, conveyance, and water storage infrastructure. Inland Action is particularly appreciative of the roughly \$134 million in federal funding for the Sites Reservoir from the Bureau of Reclamation and the federal support for making that important project happen. Funding critical water infrastructure projects, such as the Sites Reservoir, provide reliable water sources for millions of Americans impacted by drought.

Support Water Conservation Rebate Tax Parity. Water conservation rebates provided by public utilities or governments are not currently exempt from federal taxes. Inland Action continues to support a federal tax exemption for water conservation rebates to encourage additional water savings. In particular, Inland Action supports any successor bill introduced by the 119th Congress to H.R. 8682 (Huffman) and S. 4897 (Butler), which were both introduced in the 118th Congress (similar bills had been introduced in the 114th, 115th, 116th, and 117th Congresses). Those bills, known as the Water Conservation Rebate Tax Parity Act, would extend the tax exemption that currently exists for energy conservation devices to include water conservation and stormwater management devices as well. We do not believe federal legislators should give up on this effort.

Federal Support for Water Purveyor Consolidation Efforts. In recent years, the State of California has looked for mechanisms to address significant infrastructure and water quality issues associated with small, typically private, water systems. This is a significant problem in rural areas, particularly the Central Valley. Most stakeholders agree that consolidation of these water systems is one mechanism to address this. Unfortunately, State efforts to address the issues have thus far focused on the prospect of a universal water tax, paid by all customers on a per unit or per person basis. Instead, Inland Action supports federal cooperation with and funding to the State to incentivize consolidation of water systems, ideally into public bodies with local accountability and decision-making. Incentivizing consolidation requires significant funds to address infrastructure needs and address water quality problems.

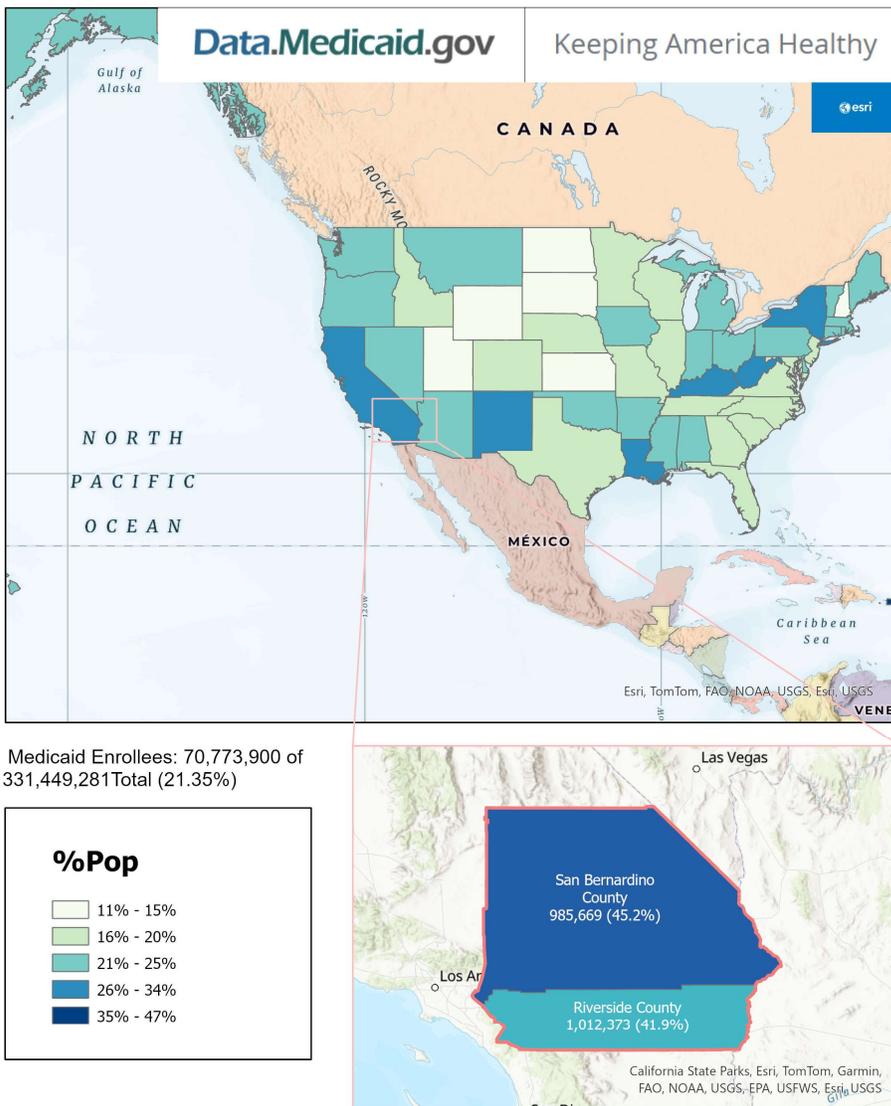
Healthcare Issues

Oppose proposed cuts to Medicaid. The potential cuts to Medicaid, known as Medi-Cal in California, pose a significant threat to the health and well-being of the Inland Empire region, a diverse area that encompasses Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

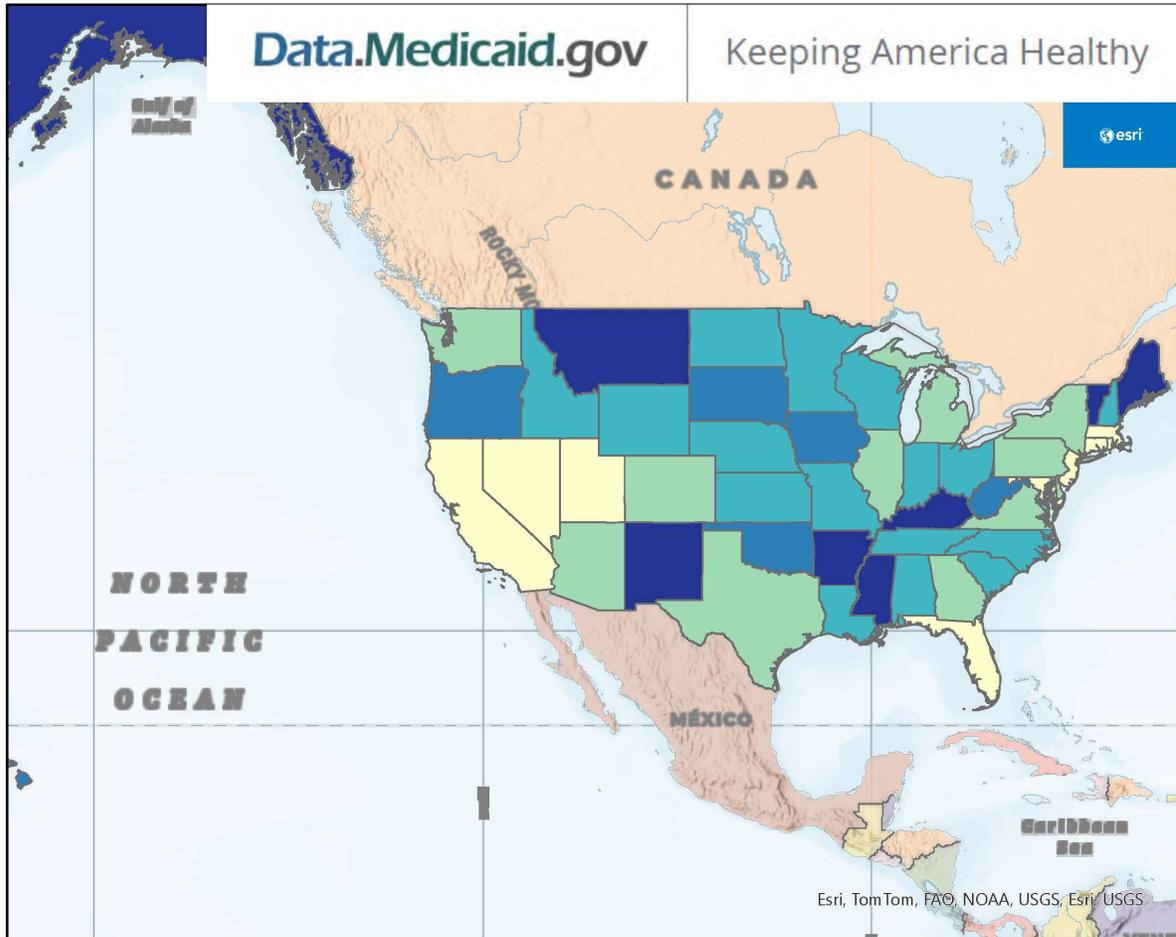
Congress must take a stand against arbitrary or unnecessary eligibility restrictions and funding cuts to Medicaid. The stakes are too high, and the consequences of inaction could jeopardize the health and well-being of millions in the Inland Empire region. By preserving Medicaid funding, we uphold our commitment to ensure that all individuals, regardless of their economic status, have access to the healthcare services they need to thrive.

As the largest single source of health coverage for low-income populations in the nation, Medicaid plays a crucial role in providing necessary medical services to vulnerable groups, including children, families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities. Here in California, over 15 million rely on Medi-Cal, including 2.2 million seniors and people with disabilities. With 45% of the population in San Bernardino County and 42% in Riverside County depending on this program, any cuts would have far-reaching implications for the healthcare landscape. Beyond the Inland Empire, 21% of the entire country relies on Medicaid with significant impacts in rural areas.

Medicaid and CHIP Enrollees

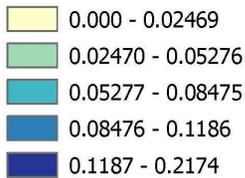


Rural Medicaid and CHIP Enrollees



Rural Enrollees: 15,816,323 of 70,739,195 Total (22.35%)

Enrollees / Population



Normalized by total population

ST	Enrollees	PctTotal	ST	Enrollees	PctTotal	ST	Enrollees	PctTotal
KY	979429	21.74%	WY	46591	8.08%	WA	337693	4.38%
AK	140172	19.11%	NH	107825	7.83%	CO	235491	4.08%
MT	193940	17.89%	TN	535228	7.74%	VA	319743	3.7%
VT	110776	17.23%	AL	361121	7.19%	PA	460658	3.54%
MS	488087	16.48%	WI	406772	6.9%	IL	446270	3.48%
NM	344838	16.28%	KS	201652	6.86%	NY	558616	2.77%
ME	208923	15.34%	NC	689626	6.61%	TX	781790	2.68%
AR	455096	15.11%	MN	371378	6.51%	CA	976119	2.47%
WV	212664	11.86%	IN	436240	6.43%	UT	74782	2.29%
IA	347031	10.88%	MO	379068	6.16%	NV	57792	1.86%
OK	429626	10.85%	NE	120589	6.15%	CT	43386	1.2%
HI	142870	9.82%	SC	314115	6.14%	MD	63641	1.03%
SD	84936	9.58%	OH	703754	5.96%	FL	188433	0.87%
OR	376625	8.89%	MI	531638	5.28%	MA	54446	0.77%
ND	66030	8.48%	DE	48176	4.87%	NJ	32100	0.35%
LA	379580	8.15%	GA	495725	4.63%	RI	217	0.02%
ID	149074	8.11%	AZ	325951	4.56%			

Federal cuts to Medicaid funding would directly translate to reduced healthcare access and quality for millions of Californians. These cuts would not merely affect individual enrollees, they would also ripple through the entire healthcare ecosystem. The Inland Empire already faces significant healthcare challenges, including high rates of uninsured individuals, limited access to specialty care, and existing health disparities. Reducing federal funding for Medi-Cal would exacerbate these issues, putting additional strain on local hospitals and health systems that are already stretched thin.

Hospitals in the Inland Empire often serve a high percentage of low-income patients who rely on Medicaid for essential medical services. These facilities, many of which are the largest employers in their communities, may be forced to make difficult decisions in the face of declining revenues. Potential layoffs and reduced services could lead to a deterioration of critical programs, such as maternal and child health services, emergency care, and mental health support. This is particularly concerning in a region that already grapples with health disparities and socio-economic challenges.

Moreover, the financial instability resulting from decreased Medicaid reimbursements could hinder hospitals' ability to invest in necessary infrastructure improvements and technology upgrades. In an era where quality of care is increasingly linked to technological advancements and facility modernization, this stagnation could lead to longer wait times, decreased access to essential services, and ultimately a decline in the overall health outcomes of the population. The impact would be particularly poignant for marginalized communities who rely on these services the most and who already face barriers to accessing quality healthcare.

It is essential to recognize that proposed cuts to Medicaid are not just budgetary adjustments; they represent a fundamental shift in how we prioritize healthcare for low-income Americans. As Congress considers budget reconciliation measures that could lead to significant reductions in federal spending for Medicaid, it is crucial to advocate for the maintenance of funding at current levels. The health of the Inland Empire's population—and the viability of its healthcare system—depends on it.

Support H.R. 7635 (Matsui), the 340B PATIENTS Act, Drug Pricing Program. Over 30 years ago, Congress established the 340B Drug Pricing Program to provide safety-net hospitals with financial relief from high prescription drug costs. This program operates without the use of State or federal funds and imposes no cost on taxpayers. It serves as a crucial lifeline for eligible hospitals, ensuring that the patients and communities they serve have access to essential healthcare services. H.R. 7635, the 340B PATIENTS Act, introduces sensible reforms to strengthen the program and preserve its intended purpose. **Preserving access to care in rural and underserved communities requires stability in the 340B program. Supporting H.R. 7635 is a vital step in ensuring that hospitals can continue to provide essential health care services without increasing taxpayer burden. We urge you to support this legislation to protect equitable access to care for the most vulnerable populations.**

The legislation codifies the ability of 340B providers to use contract pharmacies to dispense 340B discounted drugs, counteracting pervasive drug company restrictions that hinder access to vital medications for underserved patients. These restrictions create unnecessary barriers that prevent vulnerable populations from obtaining necessary treatments, exacerbating health disparities.

Despite operating on a slim 0.1% margin, in 2019, California's 175 340B hospitals delivered over \$7.1 billion in community benefits—without imposing additional costs on taxpayers. The savings

realized through the 340B program enable hospitals to offer critical services such as medication therapy management, diabetes education, mobile health care clinics, behavioral health services, opioid treatment programs, and the provision of free or discounted medications to those in need. The program ensures that hospitals can tailor services to meet the specific needs of their patient populations at no cost to taxpayers.

The discounts provided through the 340B program remain a small fraction of pharmaceutical companies' revenue. A recent HealthSperien study found that drug manufacturers granted an estimated \$46.5 billion in discounts to 340B hospitals in 2022—just 3.1% of their global revenue and 7% of their U.S. revenue. Despite these discounts, the 10 largest pharmaceutical manufacturers maintained an average operating margin exceeding 28%. Further restricting the 340B program would only increase these margins while reducing access to essential care for at-risk populations.

Judiciary Issues

Construct a new courthouse for the Eastern Division of the Central District of California to accommodate the increased number of judges needed to serve this community. Recognizing that the Federal Government has the responsibility “to provide quality services which are readily accessible to the people it serves” and that the combination of population growth in the Inland Empire and the inability of freeway connections to keep pace rendered “Federal offices along the coast no longer accessible to the residents of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties,” Congress in 1992 divided the Central District of California into three divisions “to provide for the delivery of judicial services to all areas and all residents of the Central Judicial District of California.” The Eastern Division of the Court, to cover Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, was thus born on August 26, 1992, when the President signed what became P.L. 102-357.

The Eastern Division does not have the necessary resources to provide the services Congress created it for, however. The Division is now home to 4.6 million people, spanning 27,408 square miles. Its population is greater than that of 25 states, and its land mass is larger than 11 states. It is comparable in population to the state of Kentucky, and in land area to the State of West Virginia. Those states each have two federal districts, with nine and eight authorized judgeships, respectively. Closer to home, the Phoenix Division of the District Court for the District of Arizona, home to only slightly more people (approximately 5.3 million) has a total of 17 District Judges (including nine Senior District Judges) and five Magistrate Judges. By comparison, there are presently only three District Judges and three Magistrate Judges sitting in the Eastern Division of the Central District of California to serve a comparable, growing population and vast geographic expanse.

We have advocated for many years for the appointment of more judges to sit in the Eastern Division. We are very pleased that our calls have finally been answered with the appointment of the Hon. Sunshine Sykes in 2022 and the Hon. Kiya Kato in 2023. While the addition of these two jurists to our local federal court has helped immensely, there are still more cases filed in this Division than the judges sitting here can equitably handle.

As we have reported in prior years, the District Court administratively adjusts case filings among the three Divisions to ensure that all District Judges have a roughly equal weighted caseload. If more cases are filed in one Division than the proportional allotment for the judges there, the excess cases are assigned to a judge in another Division. Throughout the history of the Eastern Division,

more cases have been filed here than there are judges seated here to hear, and therefore a substantial number of cases are assigned to judges in another Division (usually in Los Angeles). While the help of judges in other Divisions in handling these cases helps resolve those cases faster than if the Eastern Division Judges were assigned all of them, it also means the litigants and witnesses have to travel a great distance further for Court appearances in Los Angeles than they would have to if the cases was assigned to the Riverside Division. This goes against the entire purpose of the creation of the Eastern Division more than 30 years ago and imposes a substantial burden – some may call it a tax – on residents and businesses in the Inland Empire.

The solution to this problem continues to be increasing the number of judges seated in the Eastern Division. Until the proportion of judges here matches the proportion of cases arising here, it will be necessary for the Court to adjust for this imbalance by assigning cases to judges in Los Angeles.

Unfortunately, there is no physical space within the existing Riverside courthouse for these necessary additional judges to sit. The George E. Brown, Jr. Federal Building & U.S. Courthouse in Riverside was designed and constructed in the early years of the Eastern Division. It has only four courtrooms and two jury rooms. The three Magistrate Judges all share a single courtroom, and two of them share chambers. The third Magistrate Judge is currently working out of makeshift space in an adjacent building. We believe this is the only federal courthouse in the country where such a situation exists. In addition, Probation and Pretrial Services currently has a staff of 51 operating from a space originally designed for 25. The U.S. Probation and Pretrial Services Office is an essential part of the justice system as the office's mission is to assist and serve the Court in the fair administration of justice, protect the community, and promote long term positive change in individuals under supervision.

The current Riverside Federal courthouse simply lacks the available space to house the judicial resources our growing community needs. A new, larger, Federal courthouse is desperately needed to provide equal access to justice for the Inland Empire. The Administrative Office of the U.S. Courts has determined a new courthouse for the Eastern Division to be near the top of the nationwide priority list for courthouse construction. The project has already been approved by both the Ninth Circuit Judicial Conference and the United States Judicial Conference. The Administrative Office has now referred the project to the General Services Administration (GSA) to conduct a feasibility study, which is prerequisite to any further action to address this critical need for a new courthouse.

We have met previously with GSA on this matter and understand they are presently working on such studies for several other courthouses ahead of our project. At that time, GSA estimated completing the studies ahead of ours in the queue by early FY 2026 so they could then start ours. We appreciate the efforts of many of our Representatives in Congress in a letter to GSA last November urging expediting our feasibility study.

Because expedited action by GSA on this project is sorely needed, the recent reports of the administration seeking to impose **50% cuts** to GSA's budget and the resulting reduction in workforce are extremely concerning. If permitted, such cuts will mean inevitable delays in our feasibility study, not to mention the subsequent steps necessary for the ultimate construction of an adequate courthouse. GSA's estimate for completion of the entire project, based on historic funding levels for the Courthouse Construction Program, was roughly 18 years from now. It is simply not feasible for our community to wait a generation, or anywhere close to it, for the necessary physical space to deliver adequate access to justice for our community. Blindly halving

GSA's budget will double the delay and prejudice to our community (at least). Not only is this proposed move unwise and severely detrimental to our community in an immediate and tangible way through the inevitable effect it will have on our courthouse project, but it goes against one of the most fundamental features of our system of representative democracy. The Constitution, art. I, §§ 8-9, places the power to appropriate money squarely with the Congress, not the Executive. We urge our Representatives and Senators to preserve their power, and play their constitutional role in our government, by assuring that the GSA has the resources it needs to service the needs of our community, in particular on this project.

Fully fund the Judiciary's budget request. More generally, we urge Congress to provide the funding certainty necessary for the Courts to continue to serve our population. Due to chronic underfunding, the Judiciary is unable to plan for, address, and fund such critical needs as courtroom clerk vacancies, court reporter shortages, probation officer vacancies, and of course courthouse expansion projects. Adequate funding of the Judiciary is necessary not only for the basic operation of the courts, but also protection of the public through supervision of individuals who have been released to the community to either await trial or to serve a post-conviction term of probation; the provision of qualified counsel for indigent defendants; the protection of judges, courthouses and all court occupants; and the compensation of federal jurors.

The House and Senate FY 2025 Financial Services and General Government (FSGG) appropriations bills introduced in the last Congress (H.R. 8773 and S. 4928) would have provided the Judiciary with a respective 2.0% and 2.2% increase over the FY 2024 level. While any increase helps, especially in the current budget environment, those small increases remain below the Judiciary's re-estimated requirements for the fiscal year. That gap in resources – \$217 million from the House level and \$201 million from the Senate level – will impact the Judiciary's ability to undertake critical initiatives in areas like cybersecurity, the protection of judges in a heightened threat environment, and necessary hiring as dictated by workload projections. Of course, any further reduction in appropriations to the Judiciary will only worsen the problem and affect adversely the Courts' ability to serve our community.

We urge Congress to fund the Judiciary's budget request fully so that the Court can plan and continue to deliver the judicial services our community needs.

Transportation Issues

Support Transportation Reauthorization Bill. Inland Southern California is the 12th largest metropolitan statistical area in the United States and continues to be one of the nation's fastest-growing - larger than Detroit, Seattle, Tampa Bay, Denver, Baltimore, and many others yet constantly connected to all. Accordingly, the need to prioritize the safety, efficiency, and throughput of both people and goods in and on our transportation infrastructure has never been greater.

We continue to push important Inland Empire and interstate solutions that can be deployed quickly and across many agencies. The following top Inland Empire infrastructure projects will have an immediate but also long-term impact on alleviating the on-going strain on our Southern California supply chain while enhancing the quality of life for our residents and businesses that continue to support that same system of systems. Our region's current priority projects are:

Brightline West – Brightline West (BLW) is nearing the start of construction on its 218-mile Las Vegas to Southern California high-speed rail line, with work expected to begin in the coming months. However, Brightline must secure financing for the \$12 billion project before construction can commence, design is finalized, and contractor negotiations are completed. A \$3 billion federal grant has been secured, and BLW recently went to the market to sell \$2.5 billion in Private Activity Bonds. Once financing and design are finalized, NDOT anticipates heavy construction to start, with the project expected to take four years to complete. For southern California, the completion of the project will provide a long-awaited alternative for commuters making their way to and from the high desert through the very busy Cajon Pass.

U.S. Route 395 Widening – Phase II – US Route 395 Freight Corridor serves as a primary north/south highway in Southern California, providing access to and linking economic centers, recreational areas, and urban and rural regions. Phase I of the three-phase approach to address the operational needs of the corridor was completed in 2021. This phase widened US-395 between SR18 (Palmdale Road) and Chamberlaine Way from two lanes to four lanes and installed turn lanes and signals at various intersections within the project limits.

Phase II of this critical safety enhancement to this inland freight corridor seeks to continue the improvements south from the junction of Interstate 15 to State Route 18 in Victorville. Demand is fed from one of the heaviest used goods movement systems, as well as from the growing population of the Victor Valley in the High Desert of Southern California. The project is currently in design with construction expected to commence in 2025 presuming funding support for this critical highway in a growing portion of San Bernardino County.

I-10 Corridor Project – Phase II (Express Lanes) – As the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority wraps up its first installment of Southern California’s regional express lane network, a two-lane tolled facility between the Los Angeles County Line and Interstate 15, progress continues to look easterly to extend the benefit to the hundreds of thousands of daily commuters and goods movement providers that use the corridor daily.

Offering commuters the option for reliable trip times enroute to job centers west of San Bernardino County, the extension of the express lanes will enhance the overall operation of the general-purpose lanes as well. As the demand for effective freight movement expands from the continued growth of one of the largest port systems in the world, it is critical that congestion and freight bottlenecks are addressed in a timely manner.

Tunnel to Ontario International Airport (ONT) Project – The San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA) has advanced the transformational transit tunnel connection between the Rancho Cucamonga Metrolink Station and Ontario International Airport. This project, an innovative mobility approach, will create a subsurface transit connection between the Cucamonga Metrolink Station and ONT terminals. Cucamonga Station is the closest to ONT on the San Bernardino Line and has consistently represented one of the higher number of boardings in the Metrolink system. The project sets the foundation for the privately funded Brightline West electrified high-speed rail connection between Las Vegas and Cucamonga Metrolink Station, as well as the zero emission West Valley Connector bus rapid transit service coming in 2025. Environmental clearance is expected in March 2025, and will pave the way for identifying a preferred construction alternative, final design, and construction of the system. \$147M in local funding has already been committed.

Inland Action has steadily advocated for a long-term transportation bill. For decades, our area's advance entitlement and project delivery timeframes year-over-year exceed industry standards. Recent years have only accelerated this pipeline including capable and reliable public-private partnerships. **Dollars delivered to the Inland Empire mean critical infrastructure gets built on time, on budget so that the strategic solutions piloted and proven for the nation are delivered on time and at optimal efficiency.** None of this can happen without a multi-year bill aligned with capacity enhancement to support the industries and companies that serve and supply. Continuing resolutions don't enable effective project delivery, nor do they ensure that people, products, and goods get where they need to be when they need to be there. Our transportation sectors and providers are ready to move with a multi-year bill, but we need your support.

Inland Action represents an economic ecosystem and transportation nerve center geographically integrated into supply chains that never stop contributing to our region, state, and the nation. While addressing the needs of a population of approximately 4.6 million people and counting, our self-help transportation organizations have invested billions of local dollars in bolstering our infrastructure, innovative solutions, and delivering emerging technologies. Our region directly supports goods movement in and out of one of the nation's largest transportation centers. This warrants greater federal investment throughout our connected transportation corridors – lifelines contributing to the health and strength of the national and global economy.

Request for EPA to comply with the recent court ruling and stop the sanctions clock pending final determination. The Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District (MDAQAMD) is addressing EPA's disapproval of MDAQMD Rule 1304 (simultaneous emission reductions to offset emissions increases at a facility). As noted in a recent court decision, the EPA approved the rule in 1996 but failed to adequately explain why it was reversing that prior approval. Due to EPA's failure to provide an adequate explanation for its disapproval of Rule 1304, the Court invalidated the disapproval, and remanded the matter to EPA to "sufficiently articulate its reasons" for reversing the prior approval.

Unfortunately, the highway sanctions clock continues to run in the Mojave Desert portion of San Bernardino County. As of now, highway sanctions are set to kick in for non-exempt highway projects beginning on July 31, 2025. While the legal action between the Mojave Desert AQMD and EPA resulted in a decision, it did not impact the highway sanctions clock. Under the "highway sanctions" provision, the EPA can halt the approval of projects and the award of specific grants for "non-exempt" transportation projects.

- The US 395 project provides critically essential safety elements to a heavily traveled corridor. While safety concerns are in part driving the need for the project, SBCTA does not believe US 395 will qualify for the exclusion because it is adding through lanes. The "addition of general purpose through lanes to existing roads" is explicitly included in the list of project types that would not likely meet the exemption criteria.

Inland Action has consistently sounded the alarm with respect to air quality attainment issues. Technologies necessary to meet increasingly stringent emission thresholds are still being developed and not fully commercially available. As a region comprised of self-help counties that continues to be one of the fastest growing in the United States year-over year, solutions abound, but more time is needed to support our transportation and supply chain sectors side-by-side with the private sector partners working the work together.