



## Heber Public Utility District

1078 Dogwood Rd., Suite 103 · P.O. Box H  
Heber, CA 92249  
TEL. (760) 482-2440 · FAX (760) 353-9951  
[www.heber.ca.gov](http://www.heber.ca.gov)

March 20, 2025

Senator Angelique V. Ashby  
1021 O Street, Room 3320  
Sacramento, CA 95814

### **Re: Senate Bill 534 (Padilla): Salton Sea Region Green Empowerment Zone**

Dear Senator Angelique V. Ashby,

On behalf of Heber Public Utility District, I am pleased to offer our strong support of SB 534, which would establish the Salton Sea Region Green Empowerment Zone.

The Heber Public Utility District provides water, wastewater, parks, and trash services to the unincorporated community of Heber, located 60 miles from the Salton Sea.

The Salton Sea Region suffers from a historic lack of public and private investment, which results in inadequate infrastructure to support economic development, poor air quality, high unemployment, workers without advanced and specialized skills, and limited access to health care. The California Environmental Protection Agency's [CalEnviroScreen mapping tool](#) identifies a majority of census tracts in the region as disadvantaged and disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution.

Today, the Salton Sea Region stands at a critical juncture, with a chance to become a major domestic supplier of lithium. This opportunity could drive regional prosperity and create high-paid jobs, supported by well-articulated workforce training programs, expanded local supply chains, and new battery manufacturing and related R&D facilities. Central to this prosperity scenario is the region's ability to unite and attract private and public investment, paving the way for a brighter future.

Unfortunately, the region has experienced major boom-and-bust cycles - economic promises that have failed to deliver sustainable quality-of-life improvements to the residents and local communities. Name the state statistic, and Imperial County is usually near the top or the bottom, whichever is worse: unemployment, per capita income, welfare recipients, families below the poverty line, elderly living in poverty, and so on.

In 2020, Governor Newsom [signed legislation](#) establishing the [Blue Ribbon Commission on Lithium Extraction in California](#). The commission brought together a broad spectrum of

government, nonprofit, and other private sector stakeholders to help the state better understand lithium recovery's opportunities and potential challenges in California and the Salton Sea Region. In its December 2022 report, the Blue Ribbon Commission recommended the establishment of an economic zone that would include Imperial County and the Eastern Coachella and Palo Verde Valleys. Federal, state, and local governments would recognize this zone, which would be eligible to compete for funding and investments.

To capture the full benefits of Lithium Valley renewable energy development, the southeastern desert valleys need a definitive economic development designation and structure that supports efficient resource attraction and fosters economic relationships between business, labor, and community

For these reasons, SB 534 (Padilla) would further the Heber Public Utility District's goal of , attracting investment to improve infrastructure, economic opportunities, and environmental conditions in communities like Heber. This aligns with HPUD's mission by supporting critical water and wastewater infrastructure, creating local jobs, and enhancing public health through environmental restoration. The bill also increases access to funding opportunities, which could help HPUD secure resources for community development and sustainability projects and we are proud to support SB 534(Padilla) and encourage your "aye" vote when it is heard in your committee.

Best regards,

Helen Diaz-Molina,  
Board President  
Heber Public Utility District



## Heber Public Utility District

1078 Dogwood Rd., Suite 103 · P.O. Box H  
Heber, CA 92249  
TEL. (760) 482-2440 · FAX (760) 353-9951  
[www.heber.ca.gov](http://www.heber.ca.gov)

March 20, 2025

Senator Maria Elena-Durazo  
1021 O Street, Room 407  
Sacramento, CA 95814

### **Re: Senate Bill 534 (Padilla): Salton Sea Region Green Empowerment Zone**

Dear Senator Maria Elena-Durazo,

On behalf of Heber Public Utility District, I am pleased to offer our strong support of SB 534, which would establish the Salton Sea Region Green Empowerment Zone.

The Heber Public Utility District provides water, wastewater, parks, and trash services to the unincorporated community of Heber, located 60 miles from the Salton Sea.

The Salton Sea Region suffers from a historic lack of public and private investment, which results in inadequate infrastructure to support economic development, poor air quality, high unemployment, workers without advanced and specialized skills, and limited access to health care. The California Environmental Protection Agency's [CalEnviroScreen mapping tool](#) identifies a majority of census tracts in the region as disadvantaged and disproportionately burdened by multiple sources of pollution.

Today, the Salton Sea Region stands at a critical juncture, with a chance to become a major domestic supplier of lithium. This opportunity could drive regional prosperity and create high-paid jobs, supported by well-articulated workforce training programs, expanded local supply chains, and new battery manufacturing and related R&D facilities. Central to this prosperity scenario is the region's ability to unite and attract private and public investment, paving the way for a brighter future.

Unfortunately, the region has experienced major boom-and-bust cycles - economic promises that have failed to deliver sustainable quality-of-life improvements to the residents and local communities. Name the state statistic, and Imperial County is usually near the top or the bottom, whichever is worse: unemployment, per capita income, welfare recipients, families below the poverty line, elderly living in poverty, and so on.

In 2020, Governor Newsom [signed legislation](#) establishing the [Blue Ribbon Commission on Lithium Extraction in California](#). The commission brought together a broad spectrum of

government, nonprofit, and other private sector stakeholders to help the state better understand lithium recovery's opportunities and potential challenges in California and the Salton Sea Region. In its December 2022 report, the Blue Ribbon Commission recommended the establishment of an economic zone that would include Imperial County and the Eastern Coachella and Palo Verde Valleys. Federal, state, and local governments would recognize this zone, which would be eligible to compete for funding and investments.

To capture the full benefits of Lithium Valley renewable energy development, the southeastern desert valleys need a definitive economic development designation and structure that supports efficient resource attraction and fosters economic relationships between business, labor, and community

For these reasons, SB 534 (Padilla) would further the Heber Public Utility District's goal of , attracting investment to improve infrastructure, economic opportunities, and environmental conditions in communities like Heber. This aligns with HPUD's mission by supporting critical water and wastewater infrastructure, creating local jobs, and enhancing public health through environmental restoration. The bill also increases access to funding opportunities, which could help HPUD secure resources for community development and sustainability projects and we are proud to support SB 534(Padilla) and encourage your "aye" vote when it is heard in your committee.

Best regards,

Helen Diaz-Molina,  
Board President  
Heber Public Utility District