



# County of San Diego

**SARAH E. AGHASSI**  
DEPUTY CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

LAND USE AND ENVIRONMENT GROUP  
1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 212, SAN DIEGO, CA 92101  
(619) 531-6256  
[www.sandiegocounty.gov/lueg](http://www.sandiegocounty.gov/lueg)

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Dear DEH Team Members,

I am reaching out to you today to provide additional context regarding the proposed department retitling and organizational changes. Multiple individuals – current and retired DEH staff, and industry stakeholder groups – have reached out to the DEH leadership team and me to share that a letter of opposition and call to sign a petition has been circulated online since the October 28th Board meeting. This email and its attachment will provide corrections to some misinformation within this petition.

The diversity of programs, skills, and expertise that every member of the team brings to the department is at the core of what makes this team amazing and demonstrates positive collective impact each day. The proposal to retitle and reorganize DEH is the result of an ongoing LUEG-wide effort to review and evaluate our organization to improve the overall service delivery to the communities we serve and expand opportunities for growth within the department.

As proposed, the division Director of Environmental Health will continue to be a Registered Environmental Health Specialist (REHS), in compliance with the requirements of State law and will have immediate supervision of the Health Officer programs. This structural change will allow the division Director of Environmental Health to focus on implementation of Health Officer programs, coordinating with the Public Health Officer, and overall public health and environmental safety for the community we serve. State law provides for the immediate supervision of these programs by a Director of Environmental Health but does not require this person to be the department head. Throughout the state, more than 80% of Directors of Environmental Health are not department heads; they are division or branch directors leading the Health Officer programs.

With the reorganization, the Director of Environmental Health and Quality will be the department head. A good analogy is a hospital or healthcare setting. In a hospital, the Medical Director is usually a licensed physician who can focus on the science of healthcare and service delivery. In contrast, the hospital CEO has a global view of overall business operations and administration and is not required to hold a medical degree. Under the proposed organizational changes, the department head position is like the hospital CEO and the division Director of Environmental Health is like the Medical Director at the hospital.

Two-thirds of DEH staff do not have a REHS nor are they required to have this certification for their areas of responsibility; however, they may have other certifications, such as in HazMat and Vector. Without making the proposed structural change, staff within some of our environmental health programs may not be able to become the department head. The proposed structure would allow for any DEH employee, with or without a REHS to have the opportunity to be considered for the position of department head. To oversee Health Officer programs, the division Director of Environmental Health is required to hold a REHS. This structure does not compromise science, public health, safety, or the environment.

The collective skills that you have as the DEH team- whether technical, operational, support, or administrative- are essential to making this department the best in the state. This diversity of skills allows us to successfully navigate the complex work that you do every day, including applying scientific and technical expertise, engaging the community, and partnering with other jurisdictions, agencies, and stakeholders.

The DEH Executive Team is dedicated and supportive of the department's staff, programs, and operations. Over the past five years, your leadership team has been instrumental in advocating for and securing an additional \$2.1 million annually in County funds to further the delivery of programs and services; adding 29 positions; and securing stakeholder and Board of Supervisors support to properly fund programs, which helps weather difficult times such as COVID-19.

I encourage you to read the attached chart for factual information as it relates to points raised in the petition being circulated. We will be sharing this information with those who have reached out to us; please feel free to share this letter with those who may be interested.

Thank you for the incredible work each and every one of you in DEH does and will continue to do on a daily basis to protect public health and the environment.

Sincerely,

SARAH E. AGHASSI  
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

Attachment