



**NEWS RELEASE
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New Mexico Environmental Law Center Welcomes New Executive Director and a New Era in Environmental Justice

Santa Fe, NM – July 27, 2020 - While the nation's environmental laws are held up as a bastion of progressivism, they do not serve everyone equally. The environmental movement is rooted in the privilege of affluence and whiteness that has historically excluded communities of color. The New Mexico Environmental Law Center ("the Law Center") is committed to dismantling the racist structures that are at the heart of environmental injustice and all disparate treatment of communities of color.

"We in the environmental movement are often the beneficiaries of the privileges that at the same time oppress our neighbors and allies. It would be easy for the Law Center to retweet a statement from a frontline organization or post something on our website expressing outrage at the latest incidents of state violence and then go about our lives. It's much more difficult and important to engage in meaningful and thoughtful evaluation of our place in the framework that perpetuates violence and oppression," said Ramon Padilla, the Law Center Board President.

"We believe, however, that only with a hard look at ourselves and the system we work in can we begin to really understand and resist the systemic racist structures that dictate who has clean water, air and land and who must pay the price for industrial 'progress' that ostensibly benefits us all, but in reality only serves a few. At the Law Center, we acknowledge that we have benefited from the status quo and have begun the difficult and essential process necessary to become a more equitable and inclusive organization. We are having conversations both internally and with community partners to identify ways in which we may have perpetuated oppressive structures and find ways to address our shortcomings to become better partners with communities," said Eric Jantz, the Law Center Interim Executive Director.

With this mission at the forefront of the organization's collective hearts and minds, the Law Center has made strategic steps to not only continue serving New Mexico's community, but also ensuring the staff and leadership of the Law Center begin to reflect the community they serve.

Therefore, the Law Center is proud to announce and welcome Dr. Virginia Necochea as the organization's new Executive Director. Dr. Virginia Necochea is a long-time educator, researcher, writer, and community advocate. She is the former executive director and a founding board member of the Center for Social Sustainable Systems (CESOSS), a community-led nonprofit

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focused on protecting and preserving land and water resources in the Valle de Atrisco (South Valley, NM) and larger Middle Rio Grande region.

Dr. Necochea's connection and commitment to land and water emanates from her abuelitos - individuals who were deeply connected to Mother Earth and the importance of remaining connected to the land.

The foundation and drive for Dr. Necochea's work is rooted in ceremony, her Mexican Indigenous roots, and motherhood. She strives to engage in work that places community and environmental justice at the forefront.

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About New Mexico Environmental Law Center

The New Mexico Environmental Law Center has been defending environmental justice since 1987. It is our mission to work with New Mexico's communities to protect their air, land and water in the fight for environmental justice. nmelc.org

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