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## **NEW MEXICO STATE AUDITOR REVEALS IT IS INVESTIGATING CAMINO REAL REGIONAL UTILITY AUTHORITY**

### **CRRUA Being Investigated for Potential “Fraud, Waste & Abuse”**

*SUNLAND PARK, NM*—On Monday, August 19, 2024, the New Mexico Office of the State Auditor (OSA) responded to Sunland Park and Santa Teresa community members’ request for an investigation into the Camino Real Regional Utility Authority (CRRUA) for any and all violations of environmental protection laws; consumer protection laws; the New Mexico Open Meetings Act; and waste, fraud, and abuse of state and federal funds.

In the OSA’s response (attached), the OSA informed the New Mexico Environmental Law Center (NMELC), which submitted the request on behalf of community members, that the OSA “already has initiated an investigation of CRRUA regarding the concerns of fraud, waste, and abuse.”

**This is the first time the New Mexico State Auditor has stated publicly that the OSA is officially investigating CRRUA.**

**Daisy Maldonado, Director, Empowerment Congress NM**, said, “It was definitely a surprise to hear that the New Mexico State Auditor’s Office had already begun an

investigation into CRRUA. The New Mexicans who have been suffering from arsenic contaminated drinking water, excessively high monthly charges are entitled to know what their state government is doing to remedy the situation. They deserve better than the same paternalistic course of, ‘Don’t worry we are taking care of it.’”

The OSA also stated it would incorporate the Community’s input and allegations in the [Request](#) into the OSA’s investigation, as well as refer all allegations of state law violations for compliance testing during this year’s annual comprehensive audit of CRRUA.

Each year, the OSA requires all independent public accountants performing audits on behalf of the OSA to test for state law compliance. This includes compliance with the New Mexico Environmental Improvement Act and New Mexico Drinking Water Regulations, which apply the federal Safe Drinking Water Act, as well as consumer protection laws and the New Mexico Open Meetings Act.

**Vivian Fuller, Santa Teresa resident and CRRUA customer**, said, “Many people have encountered high bills for the past 3 to 4 years, some in the thousands. We need this investigation to see what is going on. It seems like everything is being swept under the rug about CRRUA’s finances. Where did all the federal and state funding that CRRUA has received in the past go? Certainly not to the two arsenic treatment plants that were down for a year and a half.”

Furthermore, in response to the Community’s request for a public listening session and opportunities to submit public comments on the matter, the **OSA agreed to consider facilitating a public meeting.**

**José Saldana, Sunland Park resident and CRRUA customer**, said, “I think hiring another company to run the water should be considered in order to gain trust with the community. The landfill is located near water wells and I am concerned about the potential health impacts from that. I also wonder, when it comes to increasing revenue, why don’t they charge all the commercial trucks coming from El Paso who dump their trash in the landfill instead of hitting up the water customers? The costs associated with this bad water are too much. I installed a water softener 4 months ago and the filter is yellow and slimy within 3 days! The filters are meant to last six months and cost \$50 each. I will bypass the water softener because they are too expensive to be replacing them every week.”

Sunland Park and Santa Teresa community members and NMELC have since responded to the OSA in order to coordinate on a time, place, and location for the OSA to meet with community members in Sunland Park, NM, but the OSA has yet to reply.

This meeting will be open to the general public, and will be an opportunity for community members to directly meet with and share their concerns with the OSA regarding their experiences with and services provided by CRRUA.

Community members would also like to invite Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham to this public meeting to hear directly from both community members and her state agencies on the matter, given the Governor has yet to host her own public meeting in Sunland Park that she [publicly committed](#) to last month.

**NMELC Staff Attorney Kacey Hovden** said, “More transparency and accountability are needed from our state agencies and leaders responsible for ensuring CRRUA serves the public in a fair, compliant, and safe manner. If the OSA is conducting an investigation into CRRUA, it behooves the OSA to be in contact with, be informed by, and directly work alongside the community members who have and continue to experience harms caused by this public utility and the local government.”

*Empowerment Congress NM's goal is to transform high-need Dona Ana colonia communities into equitable, healthy and resourced places to live and enjoy a whole and prospered life. Nuestro objetivo es transformar las comunidades coloniales del condado dona ana con grandes necesidades en lugares equitativos, saludables, y con recursos para vivir y disfrutar de manera integral y próspera.*

<https://empowernm.org/>

*New Mexico Environmental Law Center (NMELC) has been defending environmental justice since 1987. NMELC provides free and low-cost legal services to people fighting for clean air, land and water across New Mexico. [www.nmelc.org](http://www.nmelc.org)*

ATTACHMENT: Letter from Office of State Auditor dated 8.19.24

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