

A Message From Congressman Raul Ruiz, M.D. (CA-25)

For generations, the narrative surrounding the Eastern Coachella Valley (ECV) has often focused on the challenges and obstacles faced by its residents. Growing up in this community, I, like many others, have been told that we are at risk and face insurmountable obstacles. Unfortunately, this narrative often places blame on the community itself for not progressing, without understanding the unique experiences that shape our lives.

It's time to flip that narrative. I want us to no longer view the residents of ECV as merely facing obstacles but rather recognize the strength in their experiences as the key to their success. Our community possesses incredible strength, beauty, and energy. I have witnessed firsthand the sense of social responsibility among the people, where neighbors support each other with whatever they can offer each other to get through difficult circumstances.

However, we cannot ignore the hardships that come with difficult circumstances, such as poverty, which can impact family dynamics and limit opportunities for growth. Yet, these hardships also instill resilience and a sense of compassion in individuals. My own journey, from growing up in Coachella as the son of proud farmworkers with very limited resources to pursuing education at institutions like Harvard Medical School, has taught me the power of turning hardships into a driving force for service to the community.

As a Congressman representing the entire community, I want to emphasize the pride the people of ECV have and how they display it every day. They don't seek handouts; instead, they desire a hand up combined with strong self-determination to shape their futures. It's crucial to recognize that our community members are active participants who should be engaged in meaningful ways to determine the best path forward for their lives.

Addressing the social determinants of health, and the unacceptable outcomes impacting those in ECV is paramount. Basic necessities like clean drinking water, paved roads, sidewalks, air quality, and access to quality education are crucial components. These factors influence a child's ability to learn, grow, and compete on an equal footing with others. That's why my focus is on creating policies and initiatives that bring about positive change, such as securing funding for a wide range of programs to address specific community needs.

To achieve lasting change, we must invest in the community from within. Developing sustainable, livable-wage jobs, improving the local economy, and enhancing education opportunities are key aspects of this approach. As part of this work seeking meaningful change, I am working on a comprehensive bill addressing the social determinants of health, aiming to allocate funding for essential resources like home heating, food insecurity, healthcare, transportation, environmental improvements, and basic necessities.

It's essential to document and widely share the realities of the many challenges facing those living in the ECV. By raising awareness through photography and written stories of people living with these issues every day created by Dean Mayo (photographer) and Bob Marra (writer), we can strengthen our advocacy and help garner some of the support needed for lasting change.

Finally, I want to emphasize the importance of changing not just the physical landscape of the Eastern Coachella Valley but also the expectations and narratives surrounding its residents. Together, we can create a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, and no one is held back by circumstances beyond their control.