

Dear Honorable Chairman Khanna, Ranking Member Herrell, and Members of the Subcommittee on Environment,

My name is Maricela Lechuga. I live 5 blocks away from the RHV airport. I have 3 siblings and about 30 first cousins just on my mom's side and we mostly all grew up in this area.

It's not a coincidence that the roots of East San Jose are deep with Mexican-American families like mine as well as newly arrived immigrants from all over the world.

In the 1940's when my grandfather Gustavo Gutierrez arrived in San José as a *bracero*, there was only one area of the city that welcomed him. East San José was reserved for the undesirable class of Mexican peons like him and global labor leader Cesar Chavez.

A 1937 Official Area Description of the neighborhood below the flight path of what is now Reid-Hillview Airport described it as "extremely undesirable" from a racial stand point as it had the largest concentrations of Mexicans in the community as well as Italians and Portuguese of a lower social stratum.

In 1939, the airport was relocated to its current location where planes continue to fly over a community that is predominantly Latino and immigrant. Within the 1.5-mile area surrounding the airport, 61% of the population is Latino and 79% of residents primarily speak a language other than English at home. It's also densely populated; the area is home to approximately 52,000 residents including 12,800 children and 21 schools and childcare centers.

While redlining was officially in effect between 1936 and 1939, we know racism continued to influence land-use decisions well after that, especially before the Voting Rights Act when our community's political voice was completely washed out by at-large elections.

It wasn't until 1978 that East San Jose residents had the opportunity to vote for a city councilmember from a pool of candidates living within our district.

The councilmember's name was Blanca Alvarado. Happy Birthday Blanca! She happens to be turning 91 today.

Land-use decisions of the past, continue to influence all aspects of our everyday lives from the quality education we receive to the air we breathe.

Studies show that Latinos, recent immigrants and low-income communities in the US are far more likely to live, play, and work in places that expose us to toxic chemicals, including lead, increasing our risk for cancer and other serious health conditions.

For decades, planes from the Reid-Hillview airport have used lead-based fuel, poisoning our neighborhood. The 2021 Mountain Data Group study confirmed that those closest to the Airport experience a lead increase in excess of what the children in Flint (Michigan) experienced during the Flint Water Crisis. No amount of lead is safe.

Air-borne lead exposure is an injustice that seeps into our bodies through our lungs, into our blood stream and bones where it becomes unextractable.

As a woman in child bearing age, I should not have to worry about how the lead in my bones might impact a future pregnancy or health of a baby.

I happen to be an attorney, but I hate that I have to be an exception amongst family and neighbors many of which struggled in school and opted for vocation training as opposed to higher education.

Families and teachers should not have to wonder whether lead exposure is to blame for a child's learning or behavioral issue.

Kids should not have to play in the hot sun and experience nose bleeds from the dry hot air. We've requested trees for shade, but pilots need fields clear in case of emergency landings.

The little-league baseball fields were closed because pilots refuse to use unleaded fuel.

Instead of a Rose Garden like the white neighborhood has, we got a lead garden.

Our children are just as worthy as the children living in more affluent neighborhoods.

And we also deserve roses.

In the words of Amanda Gorman, "being American is more than a pride we inherit, it's the past we step into and how we repair it..." This is a chance for Congress help write a historical wrong and prevent further harm to East San Jose residents by banning the use of lead-based fuel and allowing us to close the RHV airport.