



**RELEASE DATE:**  
August 9 2023

# PRESS RELEASE

## UNM Students, Staff and Alumni to speak at Thursday, Aug 10th 9am UNM Regents Meeting

UNM Board of Regents will be answering to the Lobo Pack as integrity is questioned based on Regents involvement in air quality regulation aimed to protect working class, overburdened, low-income and communities of color.

**WHEN:** Thursday, Aug 10th, 9 am

**WHERE:** Ballroom C, Student Union Building

Albuquerque, NM – August 10, 2023– Students, staff and alumni of The University of New Mexico (UNM) will speak out at the UNM Board of Regents meeting Thursday. Their comments will focus on asking why the Board has entered as a party in the Health Equity and Environmental Impacts (HEEI) rulemaking process and why they did so without consulting or notifying the Lobo Pack or community partners.

This move raises questions about UNM Regent’s stance on equity and its impacts on the working class, overburdened, low-income, and communities of color in Albuquerque and across the state. The UNM’s 2040 Strategic Framework, which states“..[UNM] will be a force for social justice and health equity by working with the varied and rich communities of our state to enhance the health of all New Mexicans.” Later, the 2040 framework goes on to say, “Goal 3: Inclusive Excellence: [UNM will] Strengthen the equity and inclusion infrastructure across the University through enhanced coordination & communication.”

Meanwhile, the inclusive excellence of the UNM Board of Regents is critically lacking at this time. The UNM Regent’s and their counsel remain silent and isolated from the Lobo Pack and the communities who are impacted most by the actions of the University. This is in spite of multiple generations of UNM students, faculty, and alumni engaging in cumulative impact sciences since 2015, all mostly women, Indigenous, people of color or of working-class background. Yet, thus far their work has been invisibilized and excluded. Public records for the rule-making show UNM making shared-motions with fossil-fuel, defense, and industrial partners who also are permitted to pollute in the local area. These mixed signals come in a time when we need a coordinated unified effort to analyze and respond to an issue as important as the cumulative impacts of pollution exposure.



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## **The Background:**

Bernalillo County received an "F" grade for air quality related to ozone and a "D" grade for fine particulate matter from the American Lung Association, which should be a wake-up call to clean up our air. Air pollution does not affect everyone in Albuquerque equally; the effects of air-polluting industrial permits overwhelmingly impact low-income communities, and communities of color experience the adverse health impacts of air pollution disproportionately.

The HEEI regulation, which focuses on "cumulative impacts of pollution", would "allow the City of Albuquerque Environmental Health Department and the Air Quality Control Board to address the disparate impacts of air pollution negatively impacting the health and quality of life of Bernalillo County residents by denying air pollution permits to facilities proposed in communities already bearing the disproportionate burden of air pollution". **Mountain View Coalition (made up of Mountain View Neighborhood Association, Mountain View Community Action, and Friends of Valle de Oro National Wildlife Refuge), in partnership with New Mexico Environmental Law Center and grassroots organizations like Los Jardines Institute,** has helped initiate this process and are actively organizing to affirm the call for environmental justice.

This regulation is the culmination of decades of research and community organizing to address social, economic, and environmental injustice. Though this regulation will protect communities like the Mountain View neighborhood, it would also provide common-sense and essential protections for the entire city, county, and our neighbors. It offers the City and County the opportunity to be trailblazers in instating essential environmental protections that benefit the health of all residents, as well as positioning our city for adapting to existing conditions in times of climate crisis.

"Having learned about environmental justice at great length in my education as a UNM student, it seemed to me that UNM was an institution deeply concerned with issues like air pollution in its most marginalized communities. However, the actions of the UNM Board of Regents shake my trust in UNM's commitment to many of the values it seeks to uphold. I hope that the UNM Board of Regents will reconsider their position on the Health Equity and Environmental Impacts (HEEI) regulation and instead support the regulation and environmental justice in the communities it serves." **Julian Holman, UNM LEAF Director of Operations, UNM Class of 2026**



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“Los Jardines Institute understands the Health, Equity and Environmental Impacts regulation as a common-sense regulation. It comes from decades of nationwide advocacy and science dating back to the Civil Rights era. It asks for practical steps from our local agency and industrial air polluters necessary to ensure our right to clean air in the 21st Century. Why? Because air pollution is the greatest environmental hazard we face and it's resulting in irreparable damage and harm here at home. The HEEI asks for practical steps to ensure the public gets the rightful opportunity to decide if industrial air pollution is legal, safe, and cost-worthy. How does HEEI do this? It requires a total account of the air pollution that already exists in the area where the new polluting source wants to locate. It adds a health screening to the permit process to help us assess and mitigate potential health burdens from the additional air pollution, like preventing premature death, disease, and environmental destruction. It creates higher standards for community engagement, participation, and communication. Allowing those of us who may be impacted to be fully informed and able to participate in the decision-making. It requires polluting companies to use the best control and pollution technologies available to limit harmful pollution. It in a very basic sense asks a critical question that currently isn't required in our permitting process; do we have the actual carrying capacity to permit another facility to produce more air pollution in this area without causing or contributing to significant damage and harm to ourselves?” **Los Jardines Institute**

“I find the UNM Board of Regents decision to withstand clean air regulations, contradictory and a disservice to the students and communities supporting the University. UNM stated within their 2040 plan that they will actively work with various communities to “enhance the health of all New Mexicans.” Disregarding the need for clean air policies is a complete step back for the University. As a current UNM student, I put my trust that UNM will place their students and our community first in decisions such as these, which have a significant impact on our future here in New Mexico.” **Sophia Rio Chavez, UNM Class of 2025**



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“As a UNM alum, with a master's from the College of Education, I'm deeply concerned that the UNM Board of Regents has not communicated their position on the Health Equity and Environmental Impacts (HEEI) regulation with the community. Why? As an educational institution, it is imperative that UNM care for the health and well-being of students and their families and be in a leadership role to find solutions to air pollution that has plagued working-class communities in Bernalillo County.”

**Anni Hanna, UNM Alumna, 2007**

"As a student of UNM, I am concerned about the recent actions taken by the Board of Regents regarding the proposed HEEI regulation. Our university's commitment to social justice and health equity, as outlined in the 2040 Strategic Framework, envisions a healthier future for all New Mexicans. Yet, the silence surrounding the Regents involvement in HEEI leaves voices unheard - the voices of students, staff, alumni, and the communities we serve. We must ensure that the voices of those most impacted by environmental injustices - including working-class, overburdened, low-income, and communities of color - are not only heard but genuinely considered. We cannot overlook the significance of unity and transparency in addressing the impacts of air pollution. It is not only the legacy of our institution but also the well-being of our city and state that depend on our dedication to justice, equity, and a healthier future for all.” **Feleecia Guillen, UNM LEAF Director of Communications, UNM Class of 2025**

## CONTACT

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## PRESENTED BY:

UNM Leaders for  
Environmental Action and  
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