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## Bill Seeks Election Process Change

**By Rosalie Rayburn**

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A bill filed before the Tuesday opening of the legislative session seeks to change the way board members are elected to the flood authority formed to protect Algodones, Bernalillo and Placitas.

Senate Bill 121, sponsored by Sen. John Sapien, D-Corralles, proposes that board members of the Eastern Sandoval County Arroyo Flood Control Authority should be elected to represent the districts where they live, instead of the current at-large system.

Several Placitas residents have criticized the way the flood authority was established, the amount of property tax they must pay to support it and the way board members were elected.

Mike Neas has questioned the validity of procedures to nominate and elect board members. Former board member Bob Gorrell of Placitas has called the flood authority an "inefficient and expensive" solution to a problem Sandoval County should address.

The flood authority was established by law in 2007 to provide flood control for the three communities. The law was modeled on the original legislation that created the Albuquerque Metropolitan Arroyo Flood Control Authority, which provided for at-large board positions.

However, the original composition of the ESCAFCA board did correspond to the communities the flood authority covers, with one member from Algodones, two from Bernalillo and two from Placitas.

Former Gov. Bill Richardson appointed the board members based on recommendations from the Sandoval County Commission. A board election in 2008 continued that geographical balance, but the election in November changed the representation profile to three members from Placitas and one each from Algodones and Bernalillo.

Sapien's bill proposes:

- Board members should be elected from single-member districts, which the existing board must establish by Dec. 31.
- Districts must be contiguous, compact and as equal in population as possible, based on the federal census. District boundaries will be updated after each census, but incumbent board members whose residences fall outside the new boundaries may

serve out their terms.

- If, once districts are established, a sitting board member no longer resides in the district from which he or she was elected, it will be considered the same as resignation and the governor will appoint a district resident to fill the vacancy.

- Board members will serve six-year terms, once staggered terms are established.

JoAnn English, one of the two new board members from Placitas elected in November, believes the switch to representation from districts with only a few thousand voters would be costly for taxpayers.

"SB121 will be excessively complicated to administer and have numerous unintended consequences," English said in an e-mail, adding the bill "will increase the likelihood of political corruption."

Flood authority Chairman Sal Reyes believes the bill, if passed, would reflect the original intention of the Sandoval County Commission and legislators who pushed to create ESCAFCA.

"This was evident from the selection of the original board members," Reyes said, adding that district-based representation would be more fair.

"How do you think that people in Placitas would react if all five board members were from the Bernalillo area?" Reyes said.