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CONTACT: Valerie Gorospe, (661) 303-1032, vgorospe@crpe-ej.org

Residents Advocate to Fund Health and Safety in the Kern County Budget

BAKERSFIELD, CA -- Yesterday, the Kern County Board of Supervisors voted on their General Budget for the year and in doing so allocated \$2.65 million to invest in the county's parks. The Center on Race, Poverty, & the Environment (CRPE), along with coalition partner Building Healthy Communities (BHC) and the residents of Kern County have been working tirelessly to advocate for a budget that prioritizes communities, infrastructure investments, and measures that protect the health and safety of all residents.

CRPE Organizer Gustavo Aguirre said: "In order to improve safety and health in Kern County, residents have been working together with organizations, including CRPE and members of Building Healthy Communities, to submit an equity-based budget proposal for the fiscal budget 2018-9. Our expectation has been that Supervisors want to honor the community needs and recommendations, so that's what we fought for."

Due to historic underinvestment by the County, many Kern County residents - especially those living in low income communities, communities of color, and unincorporated communities - live in unsafe environments that are heavily polluted and lack key infrastructure. The "Planning for Healthy Communities Act" -- otherwise known as SB 1000 -- was passed into law in 2016 and requires that any updates to the general plan address environmental and health issues and impacts in disadvantaged communities. The allocation of the general budget is the first step of making a more equitable future a reality for the residents of Kern.

"Our community needs a recreation space for youth and residents. I'm glad that allocations have been made for parks and recreations in South Kern," said Gema Perez, Greenfield Walking Group.

In addition to the increase in parks spending, the County has appointed a Lytle Avenue project manager that will help oversee that the road is finally paved, a long-needed improvement for those living closeby. "In my neighborhood. Our street is flooded every time it rains. The street is not paved and our kids sometimes miss school. Families struggle to go out of their homes. I'm grateful that the Supervisors understand the importance of paving our street to protect our health and support students by minimizing lost days of school," said Jose Colado, a resident of Lytle Avenue.

This renewed focus on Lytle Avenue is thanks to the hard work of students from Delano who spent the last week contacting the Kern County Board of Supervisors via telephone, Twitter, and Instagram. As part of CRPE's Call In Action with Kern Residents to express their community needs, Delano youth led the charge of making their voices heard. "Potholes, skewed edges, and lack of maintenance make it a shame that pedestrians have don't have proper sidewalks. Damage to cars is also a result of disregarded County roads in Delano. It's time investments were made to County roads in Delano." said Cithlalic Martinez of Delano.

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The Center on Race, Poverty, & the Environment (CRPE) is an environmental justice organization providing legal, organizing, and technical assistance to grassroots groups in low-income communities and communities of color.
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