

# HEALTH & SAFETY

Bakersfield, the Kern County seat, ranks only behind Fresno and Stockton in U.S. municipalities with the smallest proportion of residents who report feeling safe and secure in their city.<sup>3</sup> Crime levels are an important element of feeling safe. Kern County is a high crime area, ranking in the top 10 western metropolitan areas for violent crime.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps even more unsettling however, is that Kern County is home to the deadliest police force in the nation.<sup>5</sup> Bakersfield police killed 13 people in 2015, far surpassing even the largest police departments in the United States.

Kern County also ranks near the bottom for most health indicators. It ranks 48 out of 58 California counties for overall death rate; ranks 54 out of 58 for deaths due to coronary heart disease; 52 out of 58 for chronic lower respiratory disease; and ranks as the county with the highest rate of death by diabetes.<sup>6</sup> Despite the high disease incidence in the region, nearly 20 percent of Kern residents remain without health care coverage.<sup>7</sup> In a recent community health needs assessment, Kern residents reported air quality, obesity, asthma, lack of exercise, and diabetes as the most serious health problems impacting their lives personally.<sup>8</sup> Poor transportation planning in and between Kern County cities exacerbates these health problems by increasing vehicle pollution, impeding pedestrian and bicycle safety, and encouraging sedentary behavior.



CRPE staff and residents advocating for environmental health policies in Kern County, in 2016.

# Policy Solutions

## Improve Community Relationships with and Accountability of Police Officers and Departments

- Require body-cameras to be worn by all on-duty police officers and sheriffs.
- Require additional education and other qualifications of police officers to match the needs of prevailing local demographics, including the ability to speak Spanish or other relevant language, cultural awareness, and training on community policing.
- Adopt local hiring policies to increase the number of officers with established relationships and knowledge of the areas they are policing.
- Institute a rotating police liaison and involve community in the selection of the liaison to promote open communication and conflict resolution between residents and police departments.

## Ensure Adequate and Accessible Health Care for All Kern County Residents

- Identify areas with insufficient health care facilities and coverage in the county, including areas where response times are unreasonably long and distances to hospitals are unreasonably far.
- Ensure an adequate number of health care facilities and clinics throughout the county.
- Advocate for affordable and universal health care coverage for all residents regardless of citizenship status.

## Ensure Safe and Equitable Transit Solutions

- Work with residents and schools to identify safe route needs including sidewalks, stoplights and stop signs, street lights, and bike lanes on routes commonly used by children.
- Create technical assistance and set asides for rural communities within existing transit funding programs.
- Seek state and federal funding to pay for transit infrastructure to increase pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

