

KERN COUNTY

LIVES

LOST

**A REPORT OF IN-CUSTODY DEATHS IN
KERN COUNTY BETWEEN 2011-2023**



KERN COUNTY

REPORT STATEMENT AND INTRODUCTION

Kern County, California, holds a complex legacy in the landscape of mass incarceration and criminal justice. Home to the largest concentration of carceral facilities (including detention centers) on the planet, Kern also grapples with the highest rates of police violence nationwide. This history of punitive excess bleeds into local jails, where in-custody deaths occur at alarming frequency.

When someone loses their life while interacting with law enforcement, their death is not isolated to that moment, cell, station, or jail. Their loss is felt by every person who knew and cared about them. We recognize that no data can express the harms of mass incarceration.

Judy Edens, a Kern County resident and mother, lost her son Jason Alderman to law enforcement. On August 22nd, 2015, Jason was fatally shot seven times by Bakersfield officers while unarmed. Judy has been advocating for justice and accountability in Kern ever since, but nothing can change the pain that this loss has caused her and her family.

The following report documents this devastating toll. Tracking fatalities from 2011-2023, our data reveals the heartbreaking culture of dehumanization and lack of resources that allow loss of life to persist behind bars. Over time, the severity of this crisis has continued to increase.

The tragic cases outlined in this report serve as a call for transformation. Kern County must embrace a new vision of justice grounded in collective care, not retribution. By investing in community-based alternatives, expanding care-first programs, and instituting robust oversight, we can break cycles of trauma rippling through generations.

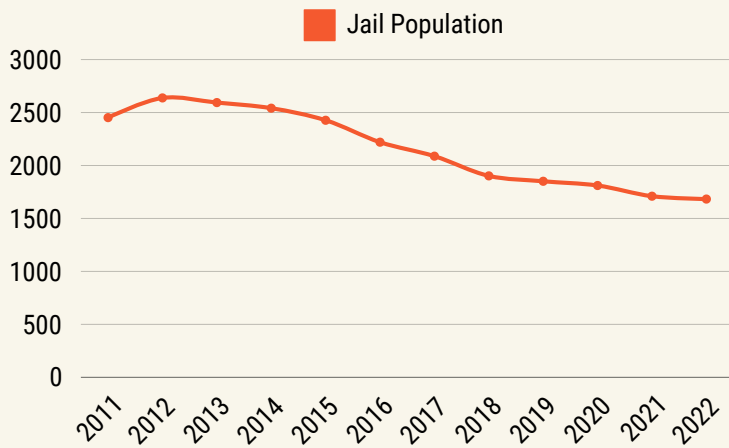
Change will require courageous leadership, deep partnership with impacted communities, and unwavering commitment to the inherent worth of every human life. The path forward is difficult but essential - Kern holds boundless potential to serve as a transformative model prioritizing healing over handcuffs. **Together we can seed new legacies where care always comes first.**

“I LOST MY SON 9 YEARS AGO AND I STILL CAN’T TALK ABOUT IT WITHOUT CRYING. IT FEELS LIKE YESTERDAY.”

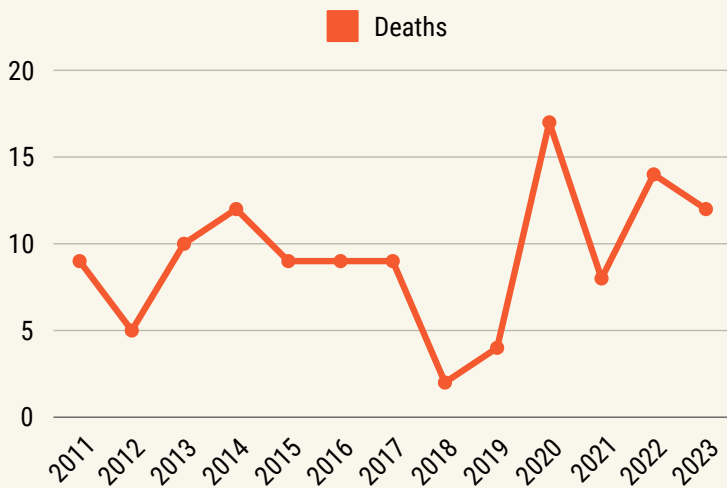
– Judy Edens, mother of Jason Alderman, who passed away on August 22nd, 2015.

KERN COUNTY

TOTAL DEATHS



Even though the total jail population has **declined 31%** since 2011, the number of deaths have increased.



Between 2011- 2019 an **average of 8 lives** were lost each year. Between 2020-2023 it was an **average of 13.**

WHEN ARE DEATHS OCCURRING?

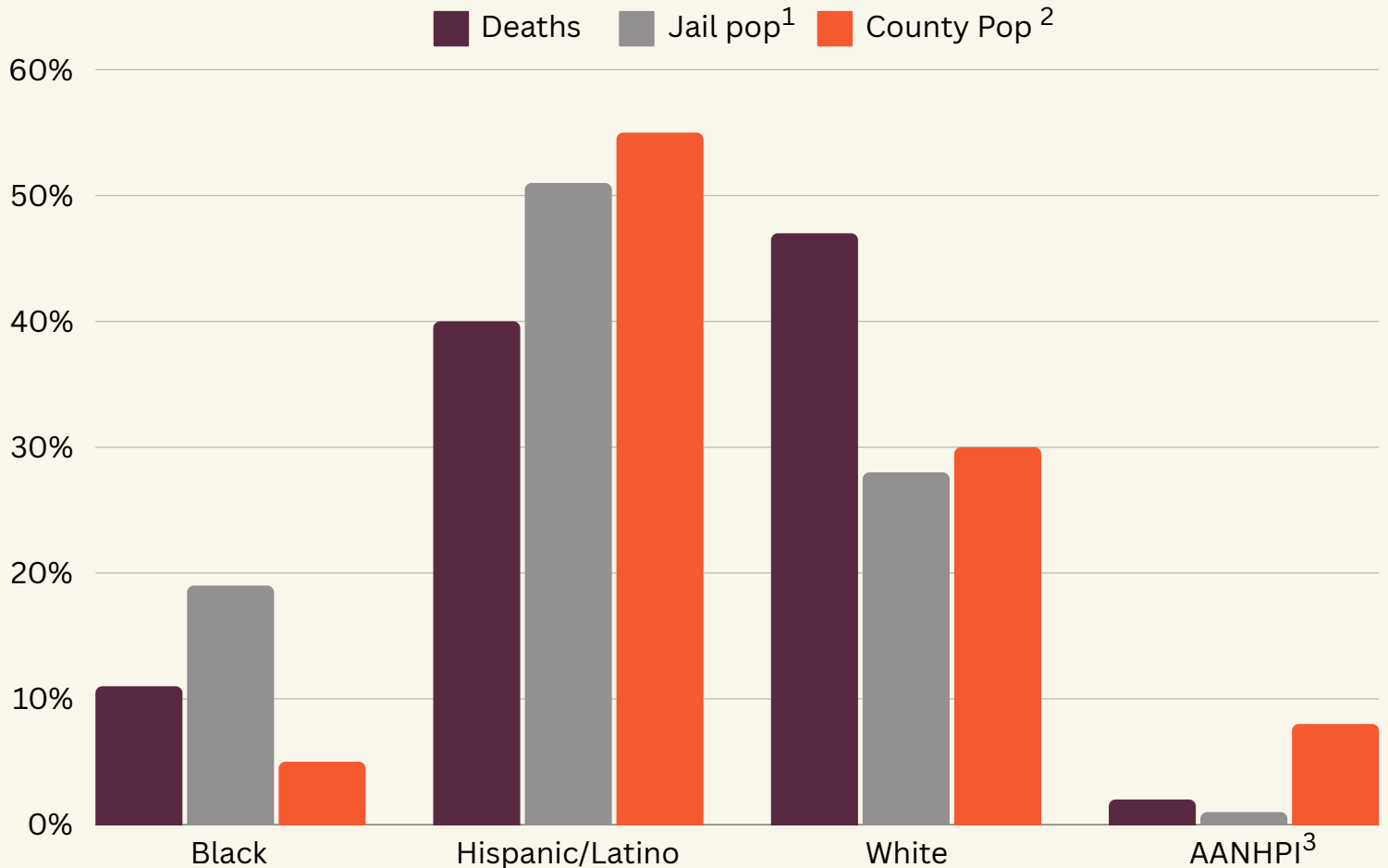
86%
OF DEATHS
OCCUR BEFORE
THEIR CASE IS
RESOLVED

CUSTODY STATUS	# OF DEATHS
Awaiting Booking	2
Booked - Awaiting Trial	65
Process of Arrest	37
Sentenced	14
Other	2

KERN COUNTY

RACE/ ETHNICITY

Total In-Custody Deaths vs. Population Averages*



Though only **5%** of Kern County residents identify as Black, **20%** of the local jail population and **11%** of those that die in sheriff custody are Black.

The data displayed does not accurately reflect people who identify with multiple races/ethnicities, and [research shows](#) that [Latinx people are routinely misidentified ethnically and racially](#), likely skewing the results and any conclusions we might draw.

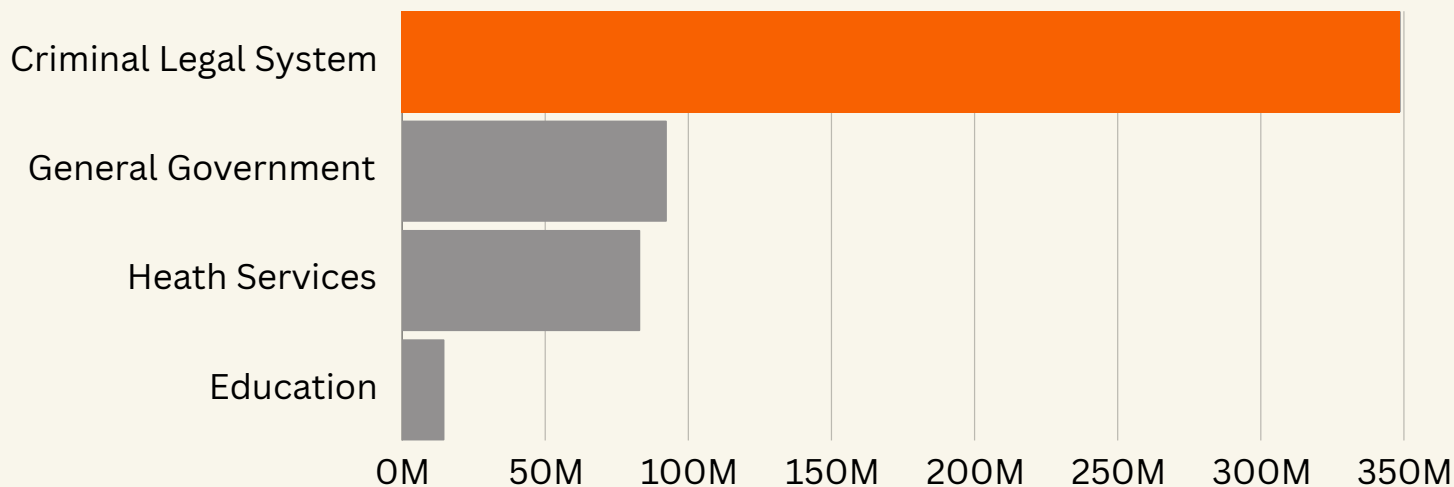
1. Jail population data from [Vera Institute Incarceration Trends Dashboard: Kern County](#)

2. County population data based on On United States Census Bureau 2023 estimates

3. [Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islanders](#)

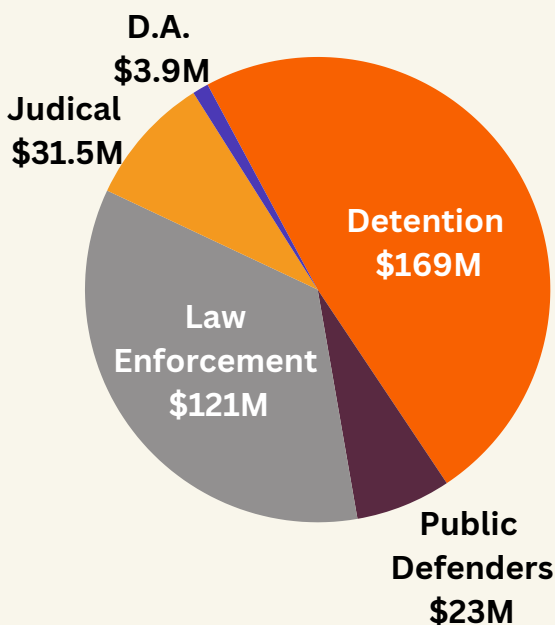
KERN COUNTY

2021 GENERAL FUND SPENDING BREAKDOWN ¹



58%

of the 2021 budget went towards the criminal legal system, a total of **\$348.9 million**



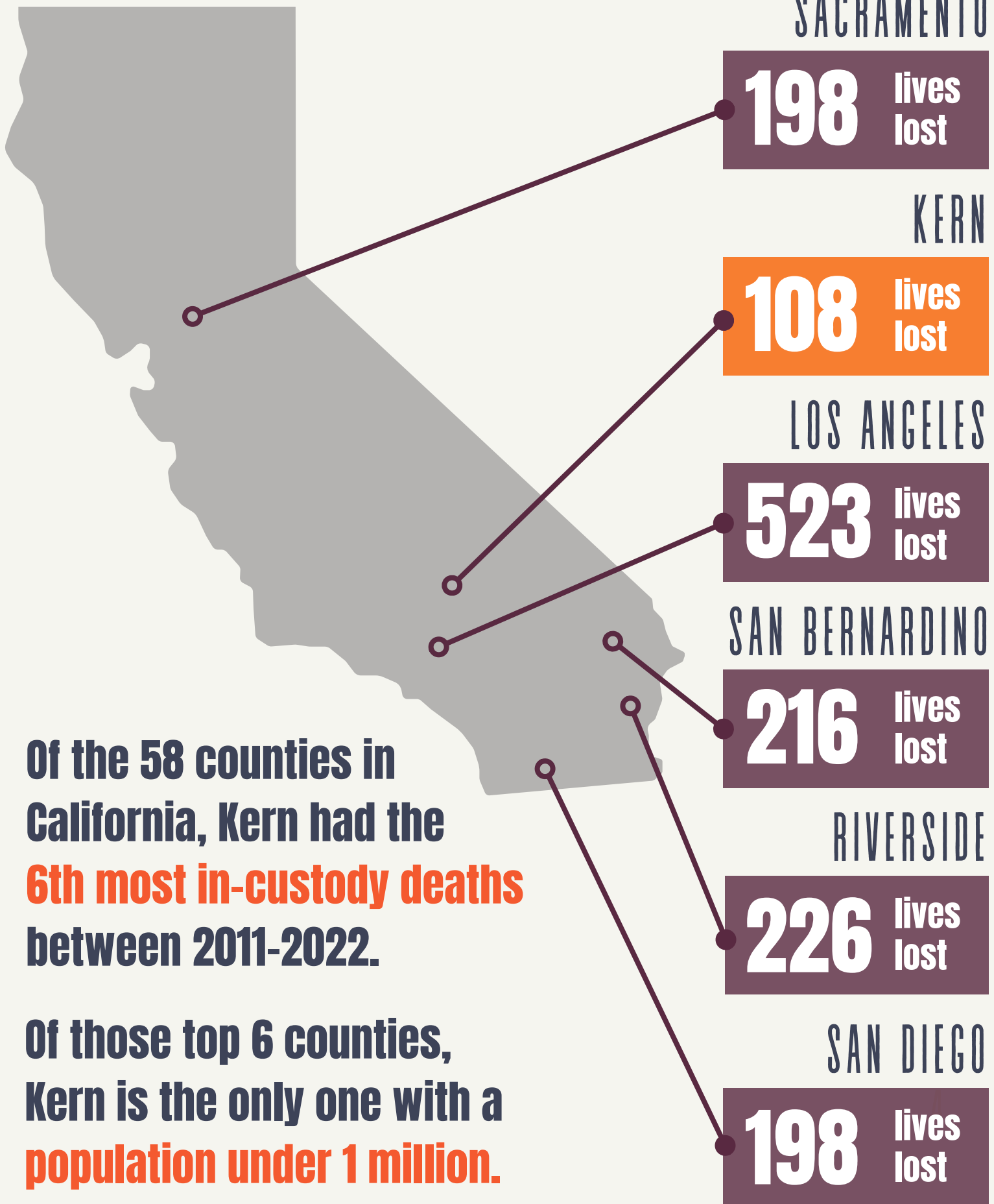
Out of the \$348.9 million spent on the criminal legal system, **\$169 million (48%)** went towards detention, and **\$121 million (35%)** went towards Law Enforcement.

In Kern County, the Sheriff Department ALONE recieved more funding than...

...Education, Health Services, & Public Defenders combined

KERN COUNTY COMPARED

HIGHEST IN-CUSTODY DEATH COUNTIES FROM 2011-2022



Of the 58 counties in California, Kern had the **6th most in-custody deaths** between 2011-2022.

Of those top 6 counties, Kern is the only one with a **population under 1 million.**

KERN COUNTY

HOW YOU CAN HELP/ LOCAL WORK

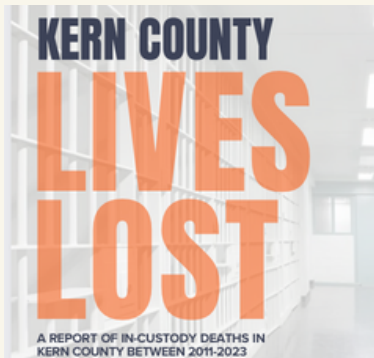


Scan QR Code to get involved with the local groups working to change the justice system in Kern County like Kern Criminal Justice coalition and Care First Kern.



Follow the statewide coalition to stay up to date on the in-custody deaths crisis happening in other counties, and view the full California report A Decade of Lives Lost at carefirstca.org/decadeofliveslost

 carefirstca.org   @CareFirstCA



View the entire report digitally at carefirstca.org/kernliveslost

THANK YOU

We would like to thank all the people who helped make this report possible, including Kern Criminal Justice Coalition, Kern Justice Family, Care First Kern, Judy Edens, Jessica Alderman, Tiffany James, MJ Vides, Rosa Lopez, Lizeth Guadalupe, Shayla Wilson, and Care First California.

 carefirstca.org/cfk   CareFirstKernCA

