



**INLAND EMPIRE
UNITED**

**Riverside County
District 1
Sheriff's Department &
Coroner Offices
Accountability**

Preface

In response to growing public concern over in-custody deaths in Riverside County jails, as well as the inherent conflict-of-interest that stems from a shared Sheriff/Coroner Office, Inland Empire United mobilized across District 1 to better understand how residents perceived these issues. Through phone banking, canvassing, and meeting the community where they are, we were able to gather insights into public sentiment, awareness, and attitudes toward accountability in the Sheriff's Department and Coroner's Office. The results reveal strong, widespread support for independent oversight reforms across the Riverside County's Sheriff Department.

Summary


IE United, along with Starting Over Inc., spent 9 days in District 1. During that time we engaged **1412 constituents**, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data on awareness, concerns, and support for accountability in the Sheriff's Department as well as support for a separation of the Sheriff's Department and Coroner offices.

Why it Matters

Riverside County is experiencing a rate of in-custody deaths that exceeds counties already flagged for oversight failures.

For reference, a state audit of San Diego County jails was triggered after 185 deaths over more than a decade. **Riverside County has already seen 46 deaths from 2022-2025** — despite having a smaller population.

County	Population (approx.)	In-Custody Deaths	Deaths per 100k Residents
San Diego County	~3.3 million	185	~5.6
Riverside County	~2.5 million	46	~8.2

 *Riverside has a higher per-capita death rate than San Diego — despite San Diego already having been audited by the state.*

Hoeven, Emily. "Audit: Inmates' Lives at Risk under California Law." CalMatters, 4 Feb. 2022, calmatters.org/newsletters/whatmatters/2022/02/jail-deaths-california/.

Methodology:

- **Canvassing/Field Work:** 1,328 constituents reached in District 1 via Inland Empire United Education Fund Door-to-Door Canvass, Community Canvass, and Starting Over, Inc. Canvass.
- **Phone Banking:** 84 District 1 constituents reached Via Inland Empire United phone bank.
- **Calls to County Supervisors Office:** 23 constituents of the 84 - or 27.4%, contacted via phone banking, **vocalized** support, showing actionable engagement and willingness to directly contact officials **immediately** after introduction of the issue.
- **Personal Stories:** Collected first-hand accounts detailing resident experiences and concerns.

Qualitative Findings

“If (Riverside County) can kill 20 people in 13 months and fail to provide any information to the families impacted, fail to report those deaths to the DOJ within the 10-day mandated reporting period, continue to lie to the public about the cause of death for all these people,” Avalon Edwards, policy associate at Starting Over Inc, on enforcing standards.

Personal Connection

- Multiple constituents reported **personal experiences** with misconduct from the Sheriff’s Department and institutional **neglect**.
- **A retired corrections employee** acknowledged awareness of in-custody deaths but wanted to research separation further.
 - *“I know the sheriff and the other side of the story, and believe the families are being misled.” - Timothy, 92506*

Former Law Enforcement Support

- A former sheriff voiced support, showing that even **insiders acknowledge the need for reform**.

Awareness Gaps & Curiosity

- Multiple comments reflected **shock at learning the sheriff and coroner are the same**, with some stating it “doesn’t make sense” and supporting separation upon learning about it.
- **Some asked how sheriff accountability impacts their own lives**, showing a desire for more personalized context.
 - *Suzanne, 92504 - Was very surprised that the sheriff’s and coroner’s were the same and couldn’t understand as to why. She agrees they should be separate.*

Community Support and Willingness to Engage

- Constituents referenced **recent in-custody deaths**, including high-profile cases, which **motivated them to engage, expressing feelings of impact or shock**.
 - *Contessa, 92505 - Works for family law and knows about the deaths. She believes it needs to be redone from the ground up.*

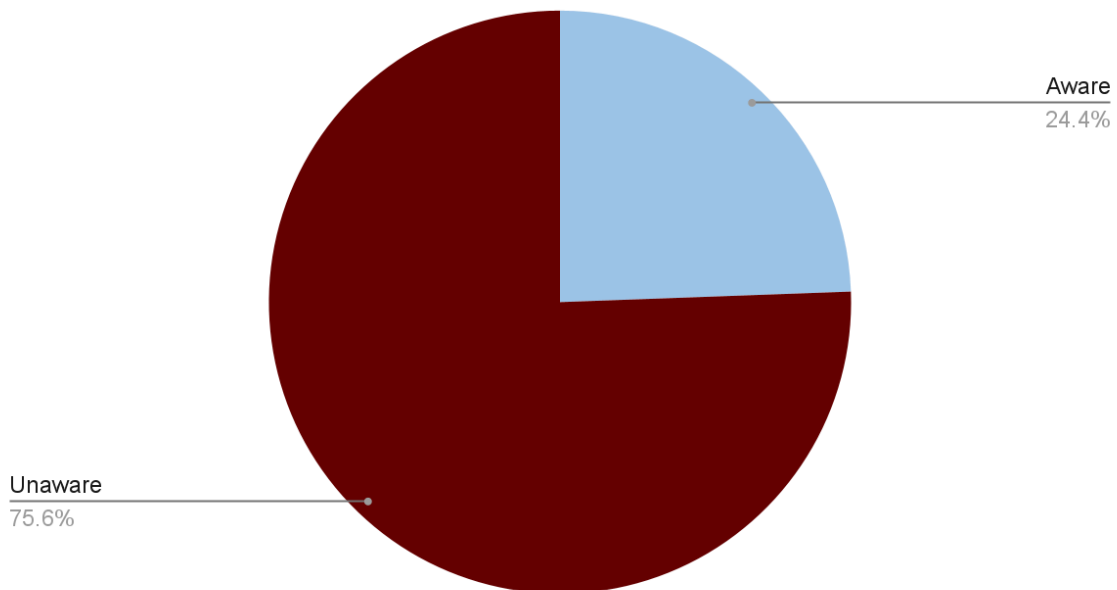
Quantitative Findings

Lack of awareness

- *Have you heard about the growing number of deaths in Riverside County jails?*

75.6% of the 1382 constituents that **responded** were **unaware** of the growing number of in-custody deaths.

Awareness



Why it matters:

Lack of Awareness = Lack of Informed Consent: Constituents deserve to know who's in power and how that power is being used, regardless of the individual's status (incarcerated, visiting, working outside, etc). Without awareness, constituents are being denied the chance to question conflicts of interest and participate in civic engagement.

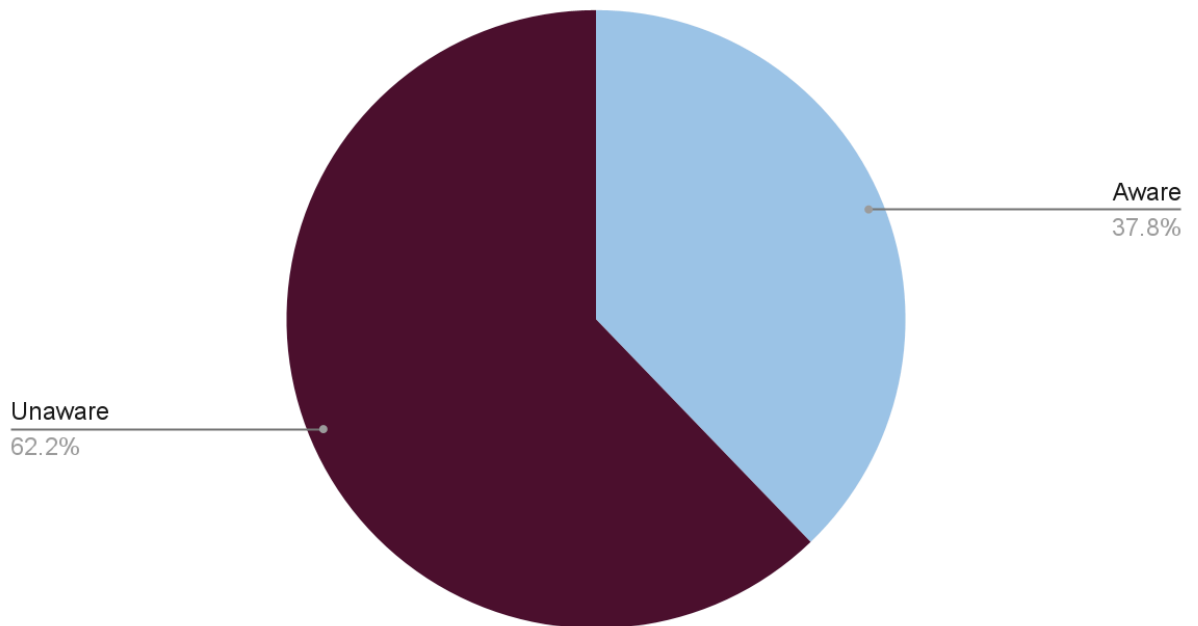
Quantitative Findings

Lack of Transparency

- *Transparency and accountability are key for public safety. Did you know that the sheriff's department and the coroner's office are the same?*

62.3% of the 1,352 surveyed constituents who responded were unaware of the lack of accountability in the Sheriff's Department and Coroner Offices.

Transparency



Why it matters:

Political Liability: Constituents lose trust in public officials due to a lack of transparency. The more people learn, the angrier they may get if no action is taken. Acting now will restore trust and support of leadership as it demonstrates a commitment to transparency.

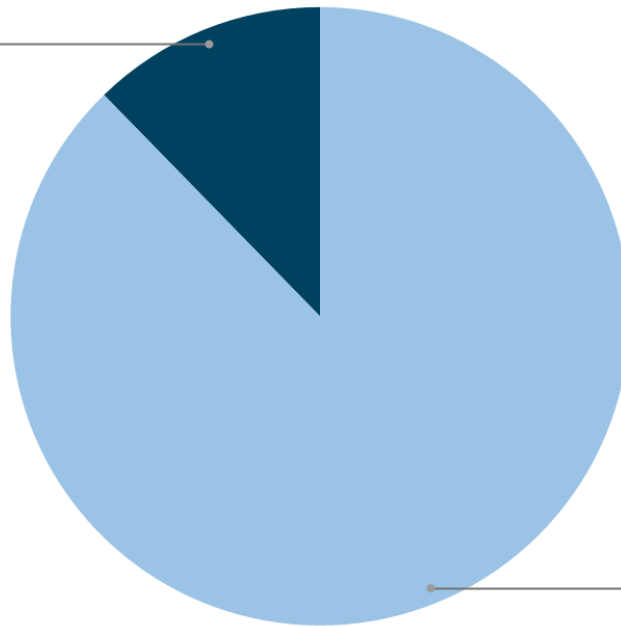
In Support of an Oversight Committee

- *Do you believe sheriff department accountability would be good for Riverside County residents?*

87.7% of the 1,286 constituents who responded were in support of an Oversight Committee.

Oversight Committee

Don't Support
12.3%



Support
87.7%

Why it matters:

Representation: There is clear evidence of strong support for an oversight committee; ignoring it **risks backlash** and erodes credibility as a representative of the people. Focusing on public safety and transparency is persuasive for voters.

Preventative: Unresolved public concern may cause public discourse.

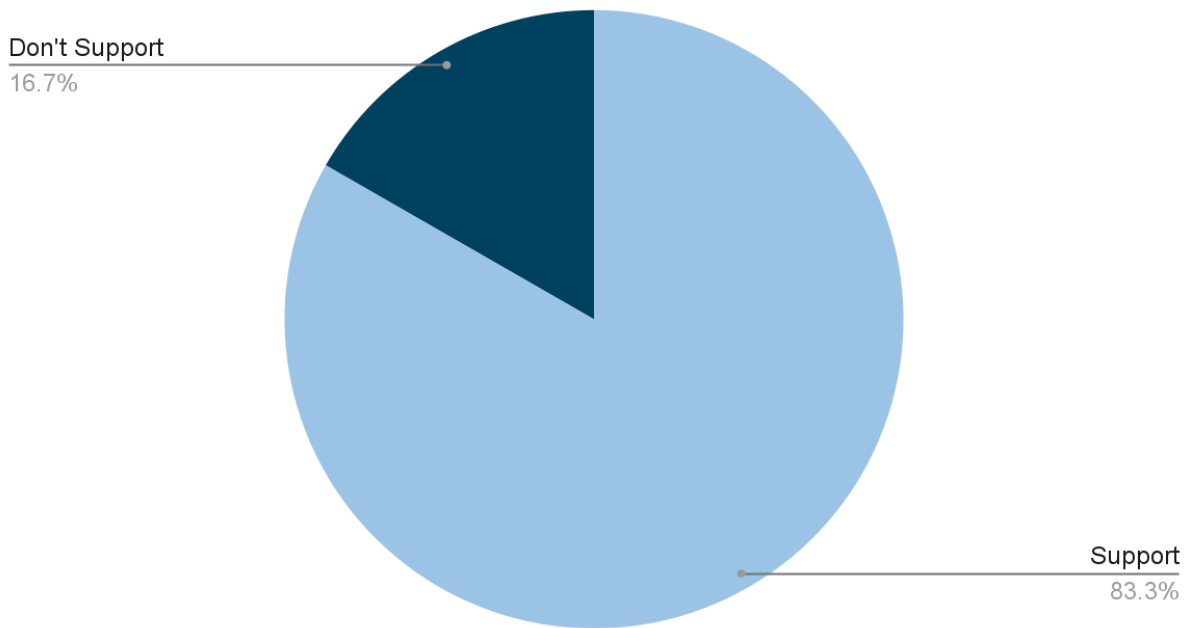
Growth: Opportunity for alignment with public opinion.

In Support of Separation

- *Would you support the separation of the sheriff department and coroner office?*

83.3% of the 1,271 constituents who responded supported the separation of the Sheriff's Department and Coroner offices.

Support of Separation



Why it matters:

Weight: Constituents want a **real fix** that ensures **objective investigations of in-custody deaths**, not oversight by the very department under question.

Equality: Shows fairness towards both the public and law enforcement.

District 1 accounted for 15 of the 46 in-custody deaths reported countywide between 2022 and 2025.

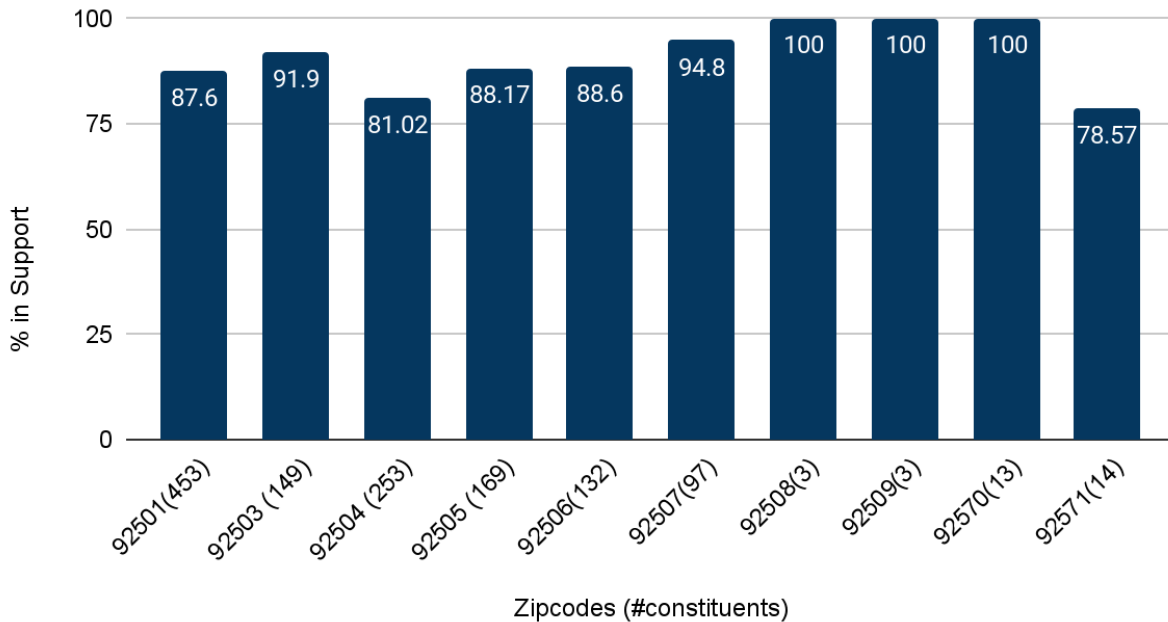
District 1 In-Custody Deaths

Name	Custody Status	DOD	Manner	Means
Alicia Upton	Sentenced	4/28/2020	Suicide	Hanging, Strangulation
Gary Haneline	Awaiting Trial	08/27/2022	Natural	N/A
Robert Robinson	Awaiting Trial	09/07/2022	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation
Katie Patton	Awaiting Trial	11/20/2022	pending investigation	pending investigation
Cynthia Heredia	Booked - No Charges Filed	10/13/2022	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation
Ronald Cook	Booked - Awaiting Trial	6/20/2022	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation
Cristian Miguel Viramontes	Booked - Awaiting Trial	02/05/2023	Accidental	Overdose
Astrid Brett Johnson	Booked-Awaiting Trial	07/05/2023	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation (latest update 2023)
Damon Robert Beitz	Awaiting Trial	09/14/2023	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation (Latest update April 2024)
Luke Hanchette	Awaiting Trial	12/13/2023	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation
Heather Marie Hendy	Awaiting Trial	12/17/2023	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation
Reynaldo Ramos	Awaiting Trial	04/16/2024	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation
Anthony Brooks Jr.	Awaiting Trial	12/22/2024	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation
Stephen Frost	Awaiting Trial	03/30/2025	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation
Morris Joseph Chaisson		04/01/2025	Pending Investigation	Pending Investigation

Geographic Distribution

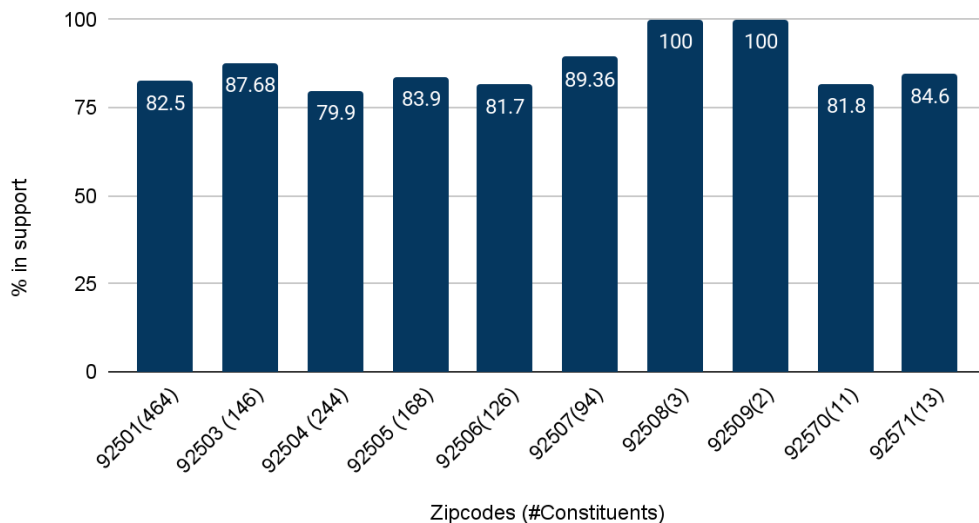
Below are graphs representing % in support based on the individual zipcodes and the # of constituents that **responded**:

Support of Accountability



Important Context: The following graph shows support for the separation of the Sheriff’s Department and Coroner Offices based on a subset of zip codes. This question was introduced midway through outreach efforts and was not asked across all canvases.

Support of Separation



Conclusion

The data shows both qualitative and quantitative evidence of widespread concern among constituents about current Sheriff's Department and Coroner office practices, as well as widespread support for oversight and accountability.

Forming an Oversight Committee would **address systemic issues** highlighted by both our data and stories. It would represent a necessary step toward restoring **public trust** and acknowledging the dignity of every soul lost within this broken system.

"Death in Sheriff's Custody Leads Riverside County to Pay \$7.5-Million Settlement." Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times, 21 May 2024, www.latimes.com/california/story/2024-05-21/riverside-county-pays-7-5-million-settlement-death-in-custody.

Hoeven, Emily. "Audit: Inmates' Lives at Risk under California Law." CalMatters, 4 Feb. 2022, calmatters.org/newsletters/whatmatters/2022/02/jail-deaths-california/.