



COMPREHENSIVE REPORT

Sheriff's Department and Coroner Offices Accountability

Prepared By Inland Empire United

July 2025



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Preface & Background

Overview and Purpose of the Report

Between 2022 and 2025, 46 people died while in custody in Riverside County jails. Behind each number is a name, a family, and a story interrupted. While the causes of those deaths may remain under investigation or, in some cases, unacknowledged, what's equally troubling is how few residents even knew they occurred.

This report is the culmination of Inland Empire United's efforts, alongside Starting Over, Inc. and Sigma Beta Xi Youth & Family Services, to uncover what Riverside County residents know and feel about in-custody deaths, transparency, and the structure of our public safety institutions. Over the course of several months, we engaged more than 7,500 residents across all five supervisorial districts, from the western city centers of Riverside and Corona, to the desert expanse of Blythe, to the southern reaches of Temecula.

We began with a question: *What does the community know?*

- Do residents know that the Sheriff's Department and Coroner's Office are one and the same in Riverside County?
- Are they aware of the growing number of in-custody deaths in recent years?
- Would they support greater accountability from the Sheriff's Department?
- Would they support a structural separation of the Sheriff and Coroner roles?

We asked these questions through door-to-door canvassing, phonebanking, and by listening directly to community stories. We did not lead the conversation. We followed it.

As a nonpartisan organization, Inland Empire United does not advocate for specific policies. We do not dictate solutions. Our role is to document public awareness, capture community sentiment, and surface the values and concerns that matter most to Riverside County residents. This report is a reflection of those conversations: data gathered in good faith, interpreted with care, and presented so the County and its people can decide what comes next.

Across every district, we found residents willing to learn, willing to listen, and, once informed, overwhelmingly in favor of transparency, oversight, and reform.

We present these findings not as a demand, but as a record.

A record of what people know.

A record of what they fear.

And a record of what they are ready to stand for.

To the families who have lost loved ones in custody: this report does not presume to speak for you. But it does carry the voices of thousands who now know what you've carried alone. May this report be a small part of what helps bring truth to light, and dignity to the memory of those who were taken too soon.

Key Findings & Recommendations

The findings from this countywide effort are unequivocal: Constituents across all five districts express broad support for increased transparency, structural oversight, and accountability within the Sheriff's Department and Coroner Offices. Throughout conversations at the doorstep, over the phone, and within community spaces, one theme was constant: the current system of internal accountability is failing to earn public trust. People voiced sharp concerns about the lack of oversight and the inherent conflict of interest when law enforcement investigates itself.

This report reflects not just the numbers, but the narratives behind them. It concludes with a clear recommendation: Riverside County must establish an oversight body, reinforced by independent auditing mechanisms and regular, public reporting, to restore trust and bring justice back to the core of public safety.

Summary of Data Sources and Methods

Inland Empire United engaged in a multi-method data collection strategy designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative insights. Through a combination of phone banking, door-to-door canvassing, and direct community outreach across all five supervisorial districts, we collected

thousands of data points reflecting voter sentiment on sheriff department accountability. Supplementing this grassroots data, we analyzed publicly available government records, reviewed external audit reports, and consulted relevant legal statutes to contextualize community concerns within the broader systemic landscape. This mixed-methods approach ensures that both statistical trends and lived experiences are reflected in the findings and recommendations presented in this report.

Introduction

1.1 Objectives of the Report

This report began with a single goal: to listen to Riverside County. We set out to understand what residents know about the Sheriff’s Department and Coroner Offices, if they were aware they are one in the same, how they feel about the growing number of in-custody deaths, and whether or not they would support oversight and accountability. We went district-by-district with the following goals in mind:

- To document and analyze community perspectives on in-custody deaths, law enforcement misconduct, and Sheriff Department/Coroner Offices conflicts of interest;
- To identify common themes, concerns, and demands from constituents.
- To present these findings back to the community and not to prescribe policy, but to offer insight from on oversight and accountability frameworks.

Ultimately, this report is intended to serve as a resource for county officials and oversight bodies in advancing meaningful and community-informed public safety reform.

1.2 Scope and Limitations

This report focuses on constituent sentiment across all five supervisorial districts in Riverside County, incorporating diverse geographic, demographic, and sociocultural contexts. Data was collected by meeting the residents where they are at through canvassing, phone-banking, and community canvassing, alongside publicly available records, audits, and oversight reports from California and other regions. While every effort was made to ensure broad and representative outreach, certain limitations remain. These include potential gaps in outreach coverage and restricted access to up-to-date public records, particularly concerning in-custody deaths, misconduct reports, and other key information that may not have been fully disclosed or made publicly available by the Sheriff’s Department and Coroner’s Office. This report is not intended to be an exhaustive audit of the Sheriff’s Department. Rather, it is a record of community voices and data intended to inform ongoing dialogue about oversight.

Methodology

2.1 Data Collection Methods

Quantitative Data Sources (e.g., Amplify Data collected across canvassing and phone banking)

- Quantitative data was collected through structured community outreach using *Amplify*, a digital organizing platform developed by Inland Empire United. This system facilitated tracked phone banking—including patch-through calls directly connecting constituents to their Supervisors—and in-person canvassing efforts. Outreach was strategically designed to capture sentiment across all five supervisorial districts, ensuring broad geographic representation. In addition, supplementary data was sourced from publicly available records, including county-level incarceration statistics, in-custody death records, and oversight audits from comparable jurisdictions within California and beyond.

Qualitative Data Sources (e.g., interviews, community feedback)

- Qualitative data was collected in the form of notes in Amplify through conversations with constituents via phone banking and canvassing, as well as anecdotal stories from families impacted. This allowed for deeper insight into resident concerns, personal experiences, and perceptions of accountability within the Sheriff’s Department and Coroner’s Office without direct quotes.

2.2 Analytical Framework and Tools

A mixed-methods approach was used to ensure both numerical trends and narrative themes were captured. Quantitative data was analyzed for frequency patterns, district comparisons, and overall support levels for reform and accountability. Qualitative responses were thematically coded to identify common concerns and recurring experiences. The two methods were applied to synthesize the data into actionable insights.

2.3 Data Validation and Quality Assurance

Data accuracy was prioritized by standardizing outreach scripts, maintaining detailed response tracking, and cross-referencing findings with publicly available records where possible. Efforts were made to minimize response bias and sampling errors by diversifying outreach methods and engaging residents across various neighborhoods and demographics.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

All data collection activities were conducted in alignment with ethical outreach practices, emphasizing voluntary participation, informed consent, and participant confidentiality. Sensitive personal experiences shared by community members were anonymized in the reporting process to protect individual privacy while preserving the integrity of qualitative insights.

2.5 Outreach Infrastructure & Amplify System

To ensure comprehensive coverage and accountability in data collection, Inland Empire United utilized *Amplify*, a digital organizing and outreach platform. Amplify enabled real-time tracking of outreach efforts, including the number of calls made, patch-through connections to Supervisor offices, and canvassing interactions logged by district and neighborhood. This infrastructure ensured outreach efforts were evenly distributed across districts rather than concentrated in a few areas, allowing for a more representative sample of constituent perspectives. The system's traceability and transparency provided quality control measures, reducing data collection bias and reinforcing the credibility of the outreach process.

Reach & Geographic Coverage

The outreach campaign achieved extensive geographic coverage across all five supervisorial districts in Riverside County, surpassing the minimum goal of 1,000 contacts per district. Final outreach totals exceeded initial targets countywide, ensuring balanced representation across diverse regions, including both urban centers and rural communities.

Outreach distribution was tracked at multiple levels—including district, city, and zip code to ensure a comprehensive geographic spread. Target areas included high-density communities such

as Riverside, Moreno Valley, and Indio, as well as more rural, hard-to-reach areas like parts of the Coachella Valley, where canvassing is often complicated by gated communities and access restrictions.

Engagement & Quality Control

Amplify employed rigorous engagement tracking tools throughout the campaign:

- Successful contacts were logged when individuals answered survey questions, allowing for both conversation tracking and issue-specific data. Patch-through calls—direct connections to Supervisor offices—were separately tracked to quantify immediate political action.
- To minimize duplication and error, real-time location monitoring was utilized during canvassing to avoid overlapping coverage, while raw data audits were conducted on phone banking records to filter duplicates.
- Data validation checks were performed throughout the campaign cycle, ensuring alignment between real-time data and final reports. While minor duplication (~40 contacts) was noted due to the involvement of multiple organizations and outreach formats (C3 and C4), these were accounted for in post-campaign audits.

Demographic Diversity

The outreach strategy prioritized engagement within Black, Latino, immigrant, and other communities of color. Language access accommodations were integrated throughout, with a diverse team of bilingual canvassers and phonebankers conducting outreach in multiple languages to reduce barriers to participation. While specific demographic data was not universally collected in the canvassing program, Amplify is able to provide race and gender data from phonebanking as supplemental insight.

The campaign's dissemination strategy was explicitly designed to avoid clustering in areas with historically high civic engagement or activist presence. Instead, the outreach model prioritized broad geographic and demographic spread, focusing on both disengaged and underrepresented communities to ensure comprehensive resident input.

District 1:

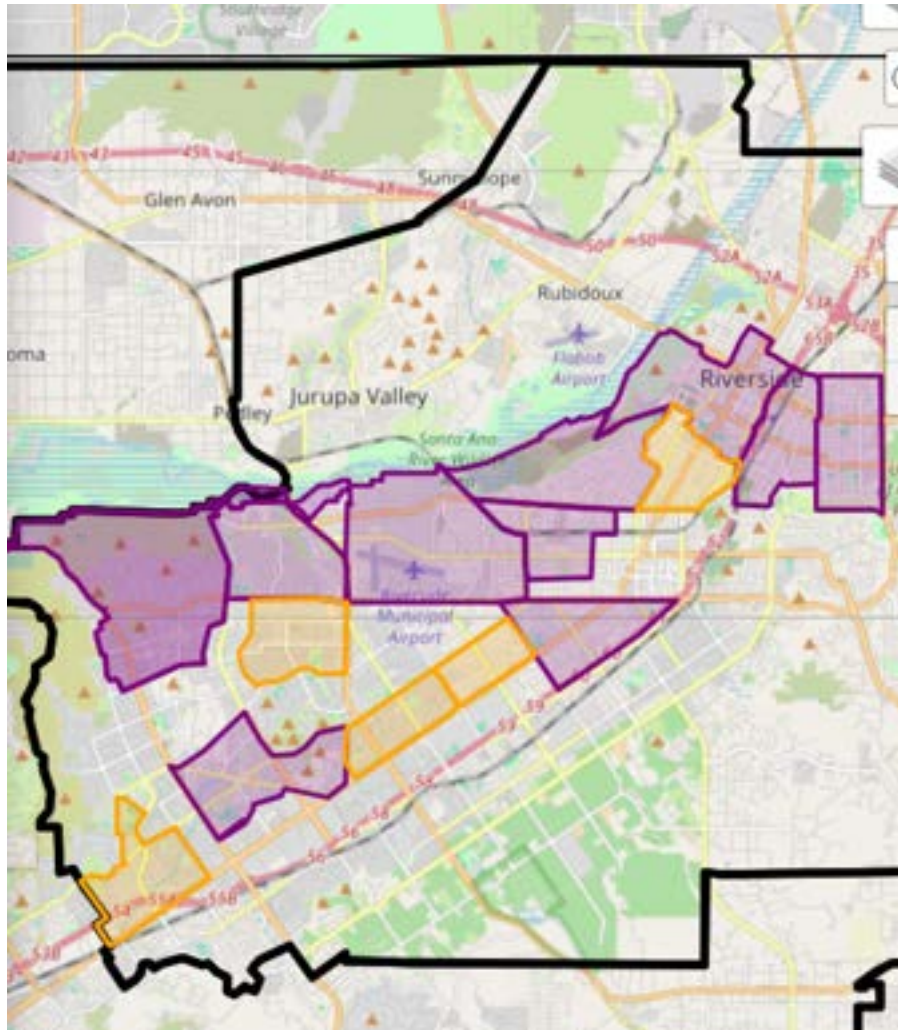


Figure 1: Canvassed areas in Riverside County, District 1. Screenshots from Amplify highlight canvassed areas in purple.

District 2:

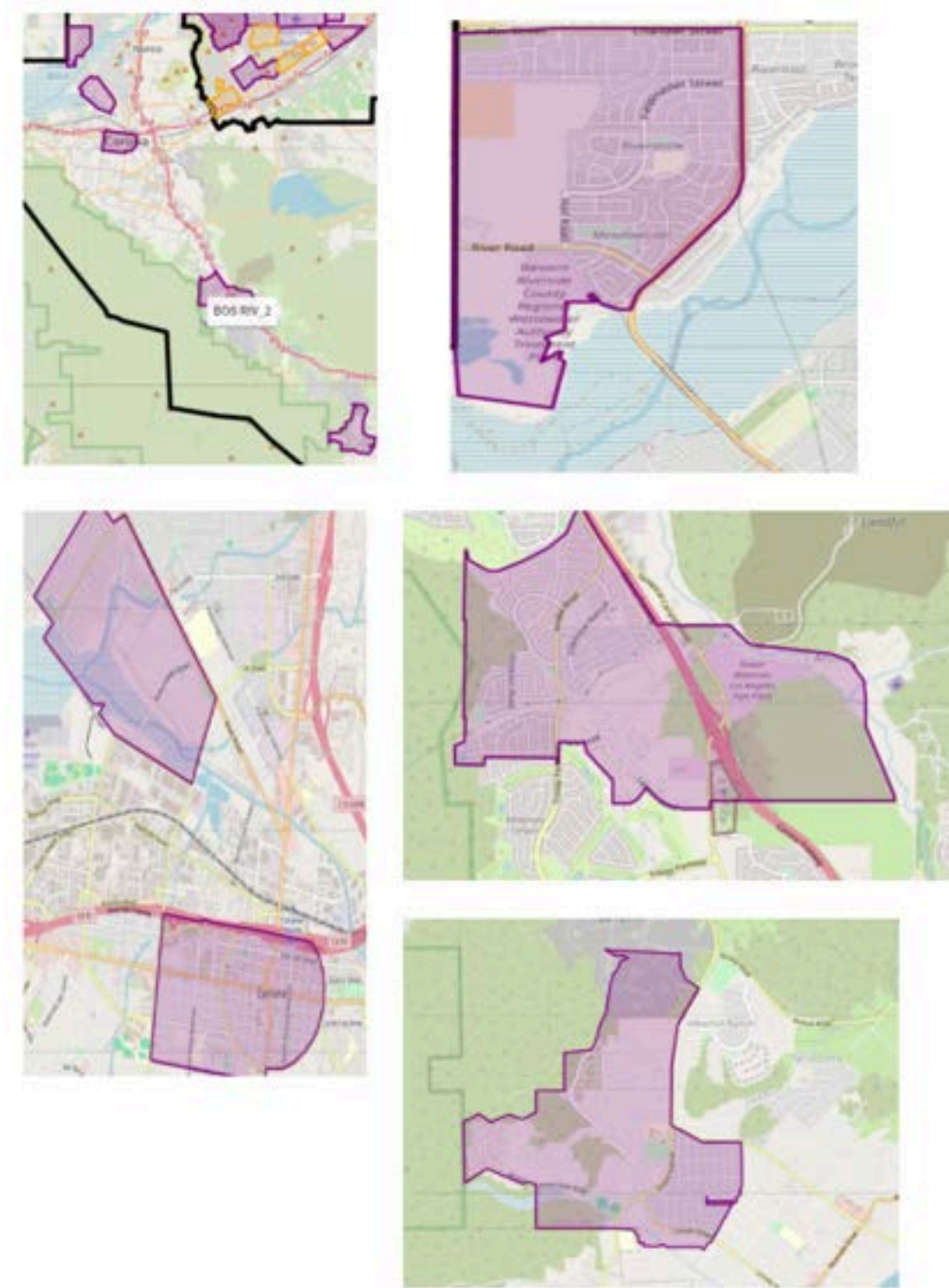


Figure 2: Canvassed areas in Riverside County, District 2. Screenshots from Amplify highlight canvassed areas in purple.

District 3:

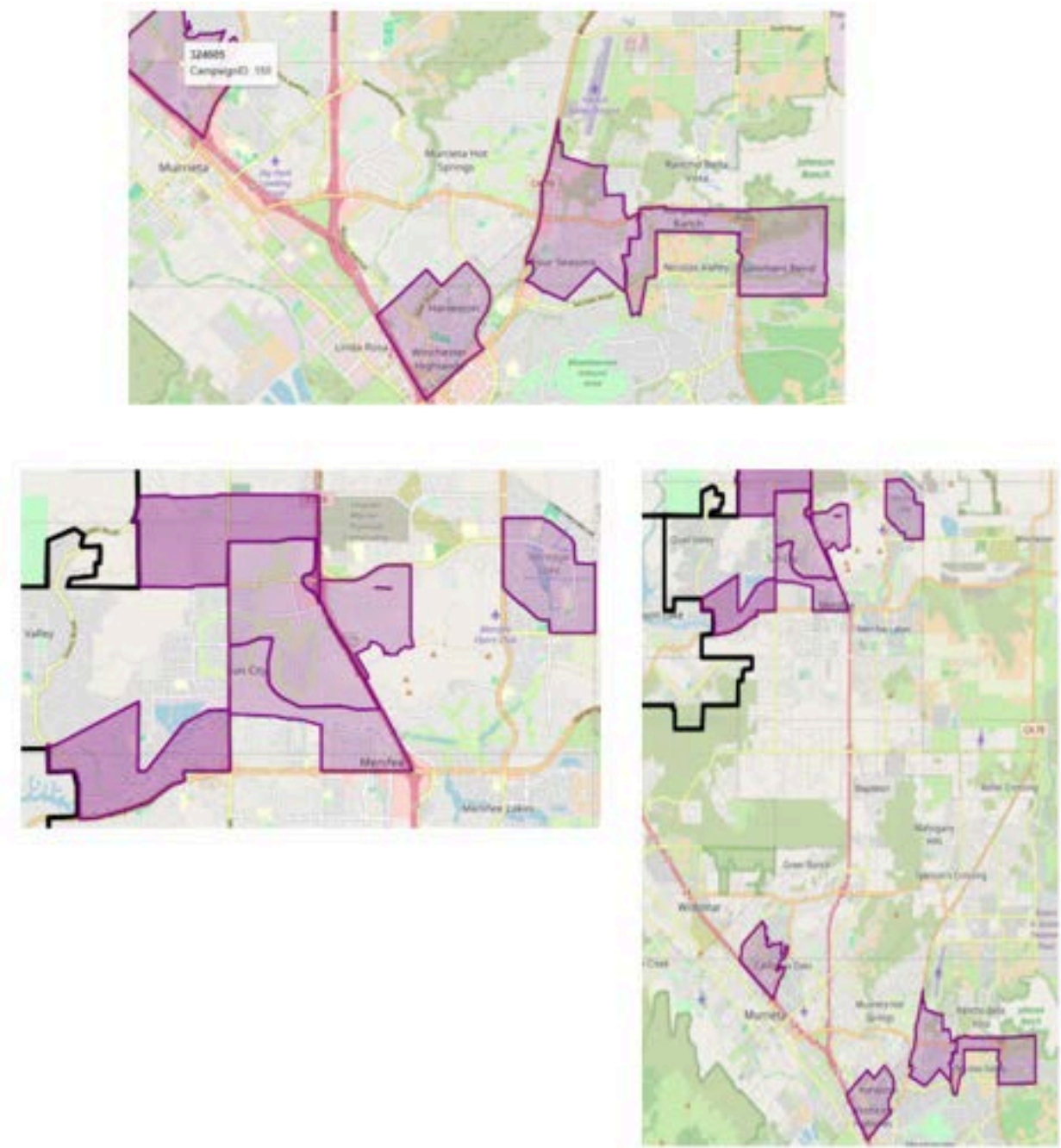


Figure 3: Canvassed areas in Riverside County, District 3. Screenshots from Amplify highlight canvassed areas in purple.

District 4:

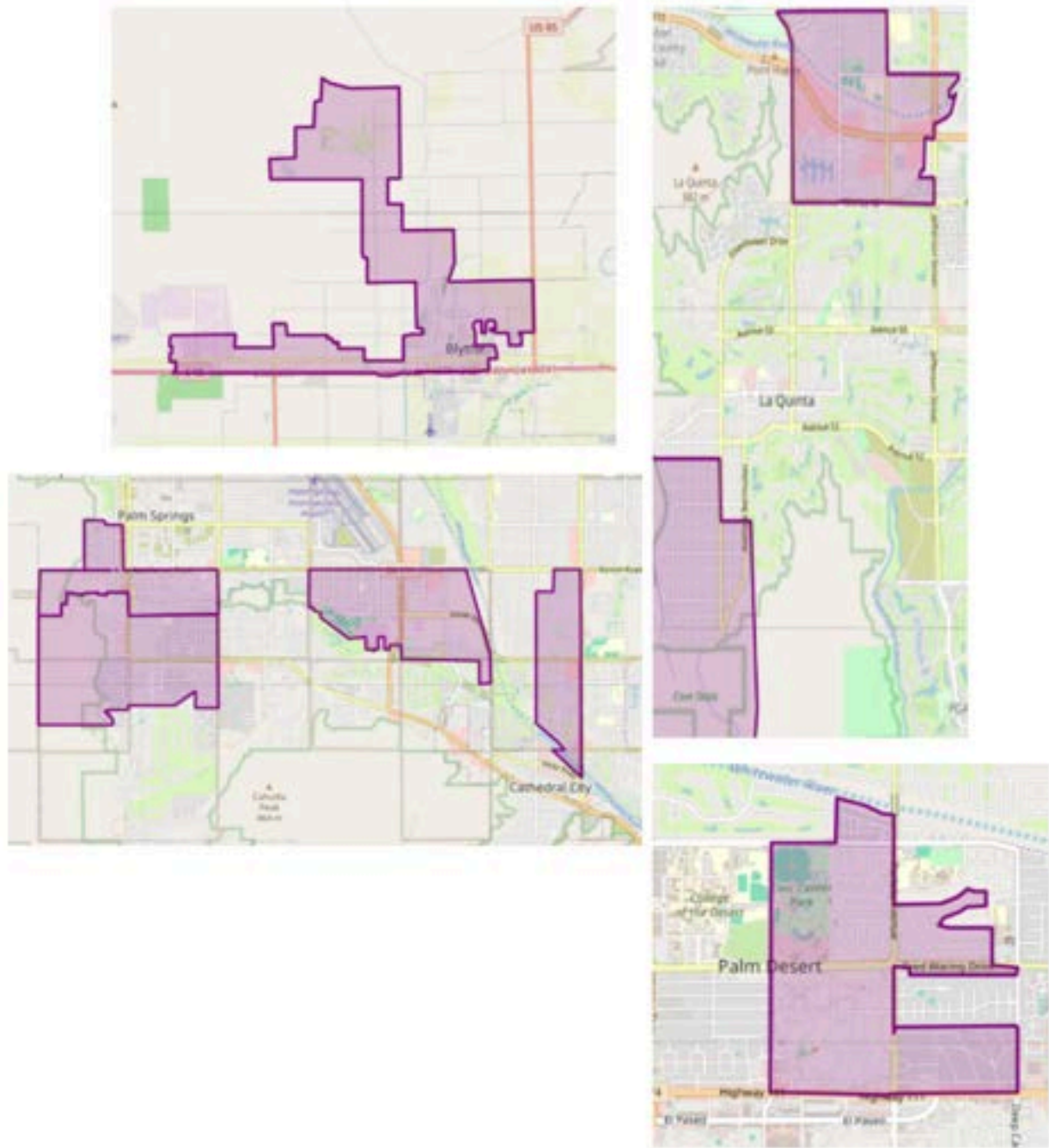


Figure 4: Canvassed areas in Riverside County, District 4. Screenshots from Amplify highlight canvassed areas in purple.

District 5:

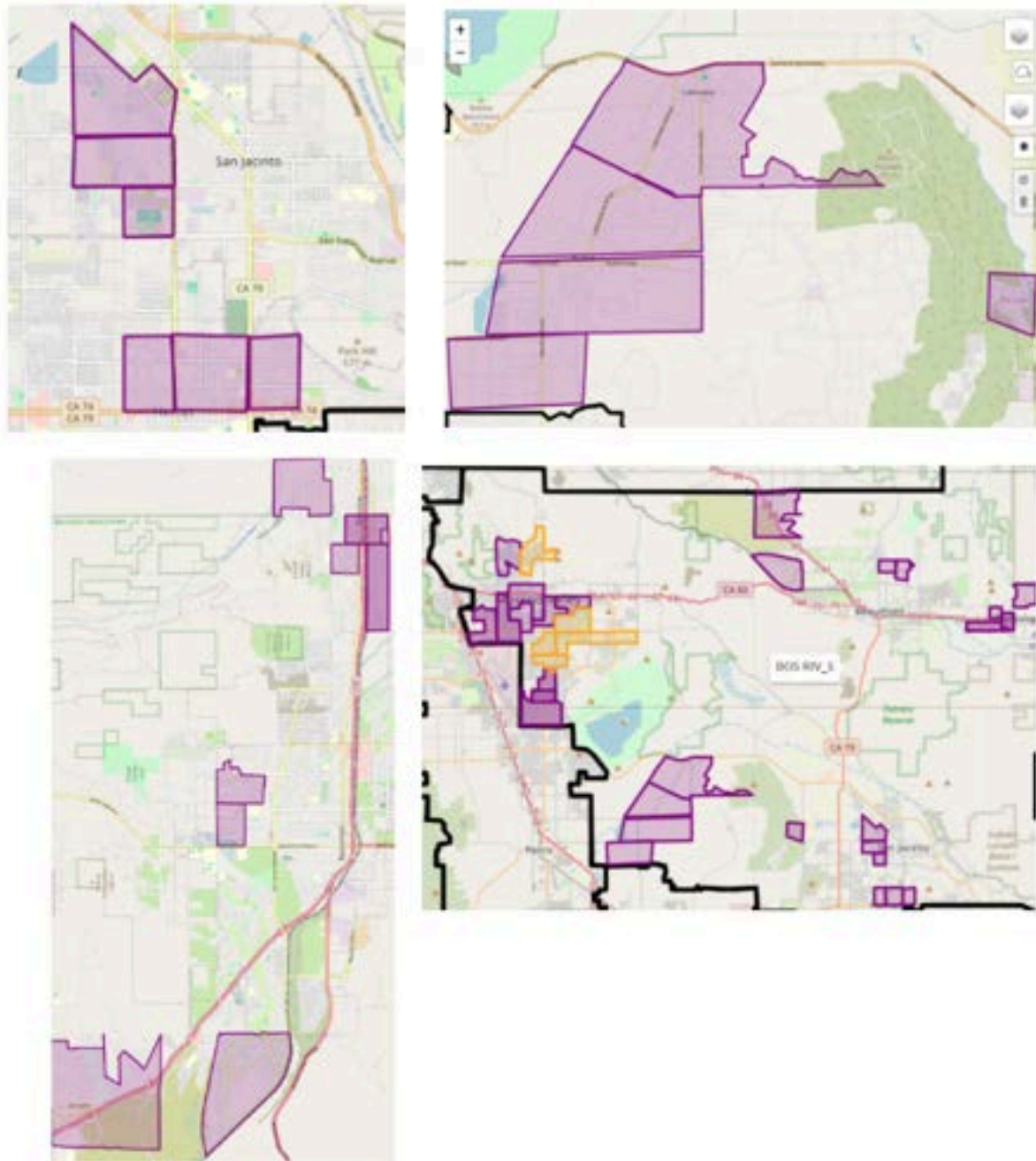


Figure 5: Canvassed areas in Riverside County, District 5. Screenshots from Amplify highlight canvassed areas in purple.

Quantitative Data Analysis

3.1 Key Metrics Overview

When Inland Empire United started this work we knew we wanted to speak directly to the community first. Our outreach was not just about gathering numbers. It was about listening. These metrics are not abstract. They cannot be misconstrued. This is data as fact, collected directly from community members. Through thousands of door knocks, phone calls, patch-through connections, and face-to-face conversations, we gathered a clear picture of what Sheriff Department accountability means to Riverside County.

These numbers tell us how many people we reached, how many said “yes” when we asked if they supported accountability, how many people thought it was time to separate the Sheriff’s Department from the Coroner Office, and how many people were moved so intensely that they decided to be connected directly to their district supervisor’s office.

3.2 Trends and Patterns Across Districts

The data, when analyzed district by district, presented a revealing consistency of concern. Whether in the desert neighborhoods of District 4 or the busier city centers of District 1, people were aware that something was broken. **District 5** recorded the highest total outreach volume at **2,306 constituents contacted**, which told us not just about the scale of our mobilization but about the hunger for conversation in that part of the county. Meanwhile, **District 1** saw **1,127 voices** in support of greater accountability, the highest raw count of residents in all 5 districts.

District 4 stood out in its intensity of support. With **84.93%** backing oversight and **80.41%** supporting separation of the Sheriff and Coroner Offices, their message was clear - this district is not just listening, it is demanding a realignment of power and transparency. **District 2** and **District 3** had notably higher patch-through numbers: **84 and 90** direct connections to their supervisors respectively.

Countywide, the numbers converge into a simple truth - 86.69% of those we spoke with believe oversight is necessary, and 79.2% support the separation of offices. These are not just statistics. They are signals of a public ready for change.

Overall County Support Across Riverside County:

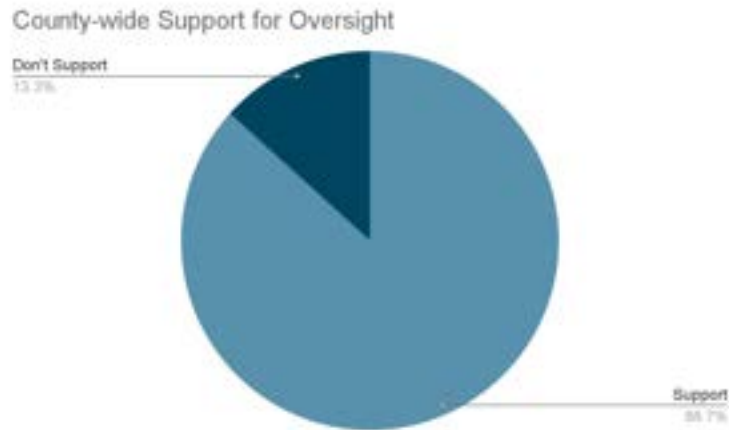


Figure 6: Community members overwhelmingly supported increased Sheriff oversight, with 86.69% of all constituents contacted in favor.

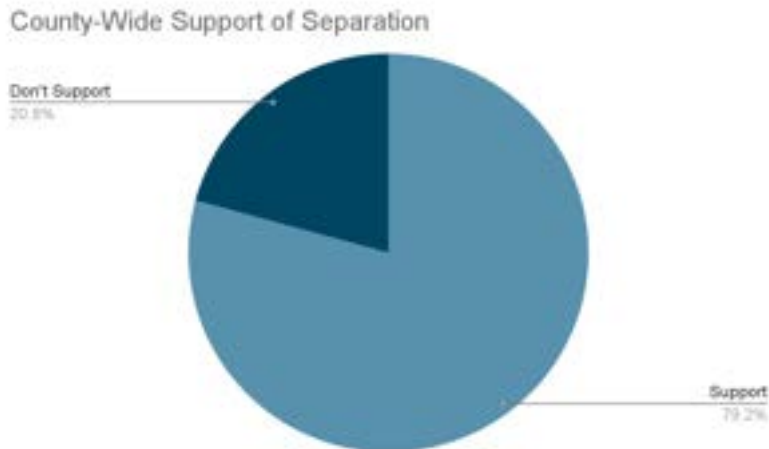


Figure 7: Community members overwhelmingly supported increased Sheriff- Coroner separation, with 79.2% of all constituents contacted in favor.

3.3 Statistical Visualizations

Outreach Volume by District



Figure 8: Constituents from all 5 districts were contacted, totaling 7,569 contacts.

Percentage of Constituents Supporting Oversight

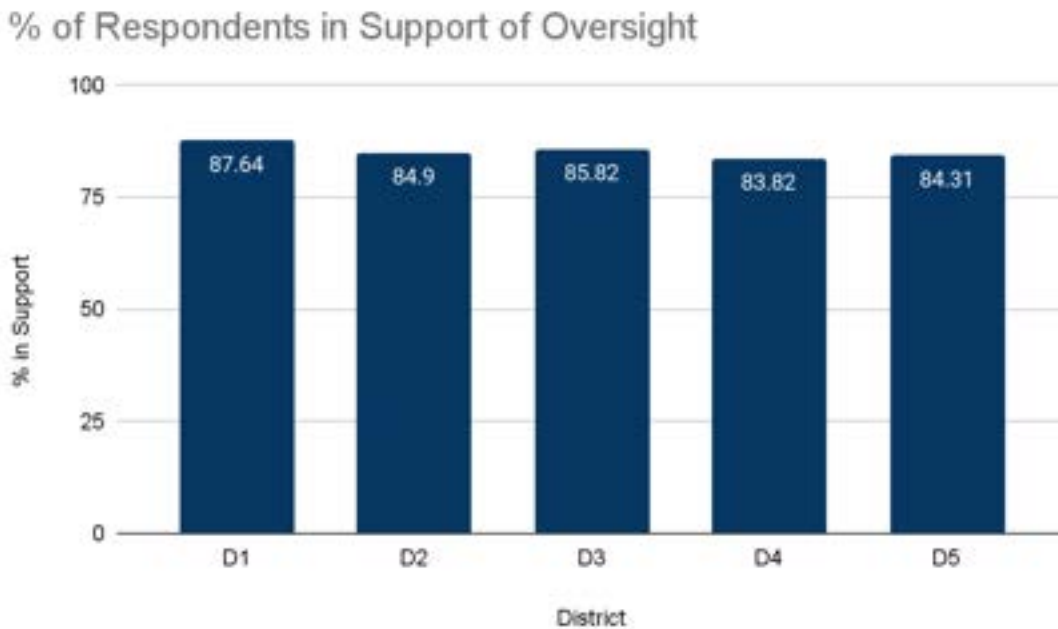


Figure 9: Constituent support for oversight was consistently high over all five districts.

Patch-Through Success Rates by District:

District	Number of Contacts through Phone Banking	Number of Answered Calls	Number of Patch-Through Calls (to Supervisorial offices)	% Patch Through Rate of Answered Calls	% Patch Through Rate of All Contacts
District 1	84	55	23	41.8%	27.4%
District 2	459	174	84	48.3%	18.3%
District 3	276	187	90	48.1%	32.6%
District 4	221	140	64	45.7%	29%
District 5	471	56	24	42.9%	5.09%

Figure 10: Significant percentages of patch-through calls suggest high political efficacy of constituents.

Qualitative Insights

4.1 Community Feedback Summary

Across Riverside County’s five supervisorial districts, residents consistently expressed a mix of concern, confusion, and quiet outrage about the structures governing law enforcement and in-custody death investigations in the county. Whether in high-density neighborhoods like Riverside and Moreno Valley or in more rural cities like Blythe, the feedback was clear: many constituents had never heard of the number of in-custody deaths, nor understood that the Sheriff’s Department and Coroner’s Office were the same entity.

When informed that the Sheriff’s Department holds both enforcement and investigative powers, many responded with disbelief or asked follow-up questions about how that could be ethical. Some expressed that this overlap “didn’t make sense,” while others admitted they had simply never thought to question it.

In several districts, former law enforcement and legal professionals joined the conversation, lending nuance and support to the concerns being raised. Some constituents described the system as overdue for reform, while others acknowledged having worked within it and seeing its limitations from the inside.

Residents with personal ties to jail custody, through family members, loved ones, or personal experience, shared emotional stories of unanswered calls, ambiguous explanations from authorities, and feelings of helplessness after losing someone. In some homes, individuals voiced frustration that nothing had changed despite multiple high-profile deaths. Others said that, until speaking with a canvasser, they had never connected these losses to the larger issue of accountability.

While the volume of direct quotes collected was limited by ethical considerations and the secondhand nature of many stories, certain thematic patterns emerged across districts:

- Awareness gaps were widespread: many residents had no knowledge of the in-custody death count or the internal structure of the Sheriff’s Department and Coroner Offices.

- Support for change was strong: once informed, most constituents expressed approval for both increased oversight and structural separation.
- Trust in institutions was low: especially regarding investigations handled internally by the same agency involved in the death.

Constituents didn't need to be experts to understand the core conflict. The more they learned, the more they questioned why this system had gone unexamined for so long, and what it would take to bring it into alignment with public expectations of fairness, dignity, and oversight.

This section is not a catalog of grievances, but rather a collective mirror of what Riverside County constituents shared when someone asked them, not what they believed, but what they deserved to know.

4.2 Case Studies / Anecdotal Evidence

In addition to broad community sentiment, individual cases provide compelling evidence of systemic failures within the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. These stories highlight how both community members and department personnel have experienced significant barriers to justice, transparency, and fair treatment.

Lisa Matus – Personal Loss and Advocacy for Systemic Reform

In 2022, Lisa Matus lost her son, Richard Matus, who died in a Riverside County jail cell after being incarcerated for four years. Despite worsening symptoms, including dizziness and severe chest pain, Richard was reportedly denied hospital care. His official autopsy cited “fentanyl and ethanol toxicity” as the cause of death, but also documented severe coronary artery blockage and visible blunt force injuries.

Lisa Matus and her family filed a wrongful death lawsuit in 2023 against the Riverside County Sheriff's Department. As Lisa stated, *“When there's grievances filed or deaths that occur, if there's a complaint, there should be an oversight board to look over that.”* Her story represents not only the tragedy of in-custody deaths, negligence, and misconduct, but also the ongoing battle families face to obtain answers and transparency.

Victoria Flores – Retaliation and Wrongful Termination Allegations

In July 2025, Victoria Flores, a former employee within the Sheriff’s Department, filed a wrongful termination lawsuit alleging she was fired under the pretext of “serious ethical lapses in judgment” after raising internal concerns. Flores claims her termination was an act of retaliation for speaking out, revealing deeper issues within the department around silencing dissent and protecting institutional interests over integrity and reform.

4.3 Implications of Qualitative Findings

The qualitative feedback gathered across Riverside County reveals a persistent thread running through every district, ZIP code, and conversation: constituents want clarity, accountability, and meaningful reform in how the Sheriff’s Department and Coroner Offices operate.

Several key implications emerge from these findings:

Reform is a Unifying Issue

Despite differences in geography, political background, and demographic composition, constituents across all five districts expressed similar concerns. Whether speaking from Temecula, Indio, Perris, or Blythe, constituents questioned the same lack of transparency and voiced frustrations with what they perceived as insufficient internal accountability. This suggests that oversight reform is a broadly shared concern that cuts across identity and ideology.

The Sheriff’s Department and Coroner Offices Overlap is a Central Concern

The structural arrangement combining the Sheriff’s Department and Coroner Offices was unfamiliar to most and unacceptable to many. Once explained, constituents responded with disbelief, often asking how a department could credibly investigate deaths that occur under its own authority. This concern became more pronounced when paired with stories of families struggling to get answers after a loss. Cases like Lisa Matus' have amplified public skepticism, especially in communities already vulnerable to neglect or violence.

Lived Experience Drives Support for Oversight

Support for reform was particularly strong among those with direct or familial experiences with incarceration or law enforcement. Constituents who had worked in corrections or lost someone in custody were often the most vocal in calling for structural change. Former law enforcement officers echoed many of these concerns, pointing to internal cultures that resist scrutiny. Together, these voices reinforce the need for any oversight model to be shaped not just by legal precedent, but by those most impacted.

Accountability and Oversight

5.1 Best Practices, NACOLE, and Oversight Models

Inland Empire United reviewed national best practices for civilian oversight, as outlined by the National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement (NACOLE). This research was not meant to prescribe a single solution, but to better understand the range of approaches that have been implemented elsewhere, and to show the care and rigor that informed the findings in this report.

NACOLE highlights that effective oversight should be independent, transparent, and community-driven with clearly defined powers to investigate, audit, and enforce accountability as authorized under California’s AB 1185. While no single model fits every community, NACOLE identifies three primary models of oversight, each with distinct strengths and weaknesses, along with emerging hybrid models that aim to combine multiple functions.

Model Type	Description	Pros	Cons
Review Boards/ Commissions	Community-based groups that review complaints and internal investigations, typically without subpoena power.	Provides community input; increases transparency.	Limited authority; no investigatory powers; often advisory-only.
Investigative Model	An independent agency or board conducts its own investigations into misconduct, often with subpoena power.	Independent fact-finding; greater public trust; can initiate cases.	Resource-intensive; political resistance from law enforcement.

<p>Auditor/Monitor Model</p>	<p>An agency audits police policies, trends, and complaint handling; recommends reforms but does not conduct individual investigations.</p>	<p>Focuses on systemic reform; policy-oriented.</p>	<p>Dependent on department cooperation. Does not conduct investigations.</p>
<p>Hybrid Model</p>	<p>Combines investigative, auditing, and review powers, often with dedicated staffing and community representation.</p>	<p>Most comprehensive; balances case investigations and systemic reform.</p>	<p>Requires significant resources and legal authority to implement effectively.</p>

Figure 11: Comparison of Oversight Models. Each model has unique strengths and weaknesses to consider in their applications.

Conclusion

When we began this work, we knew the numbers would matter, because we know the voices matter. What we did not know, or maybe what we did not expect, was how much those voices would linger. The conversations on the doorsteps, calls where silence told us as much as the words. These findings are not just statistics. They are the voices of the community asking for more to be done.

The collective data throughout this report, both quantitative data and constituent voices, reveals an undeniable truth: Riverside County residents overwhelmingly demand transparency and accountability from their public safety institutions. The rising number of in-custody deaths, coupled with widespread distrust in current oversight mechanisms, has left communities feeling unheard, vulnerable, and frustrated.

This report is not simply a collection of numbers or isolated stories; it is a call to attention and reflection. The data shows strong, bipartisan support across every supervisorial district for reforms that put independent, empowered oversight bodies at the center of Sheriff Department accountability. The qualitative testimonies underscore how deeply these issues impact families across the county.

Transparency is not optional. It is the foundation of public trust.

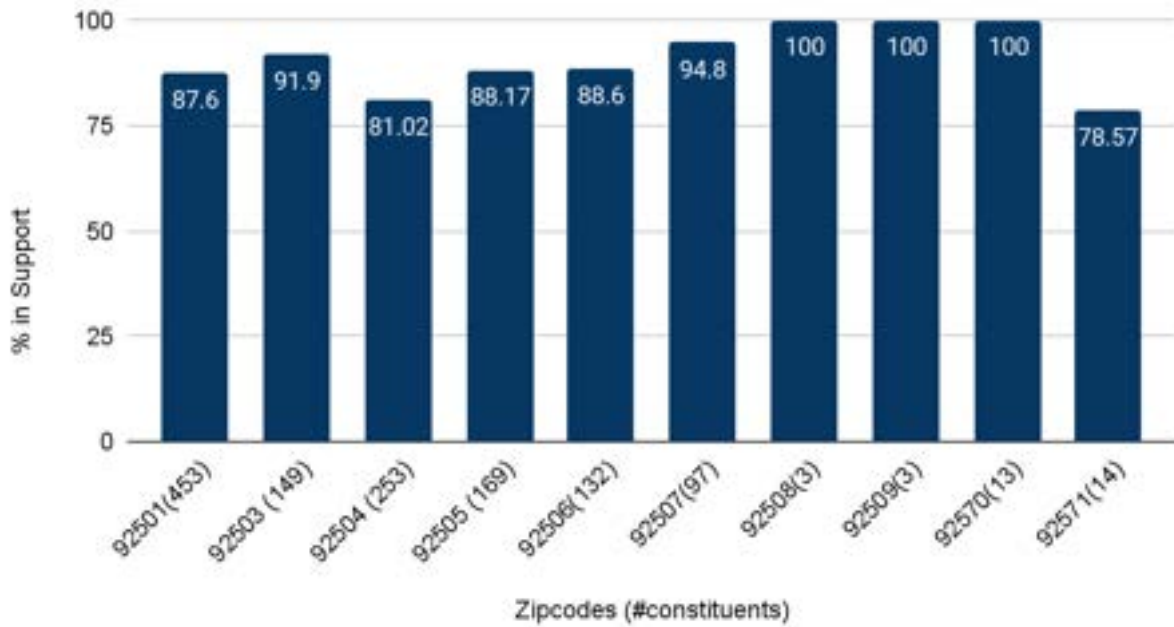
Accountability is not negotiable. It is the safeguard of justice and community safety.

Riverside County has reached a critical juncture where meaningful reform is overdue. The path forward requires structures that are independent and responsive to the communities they serve.

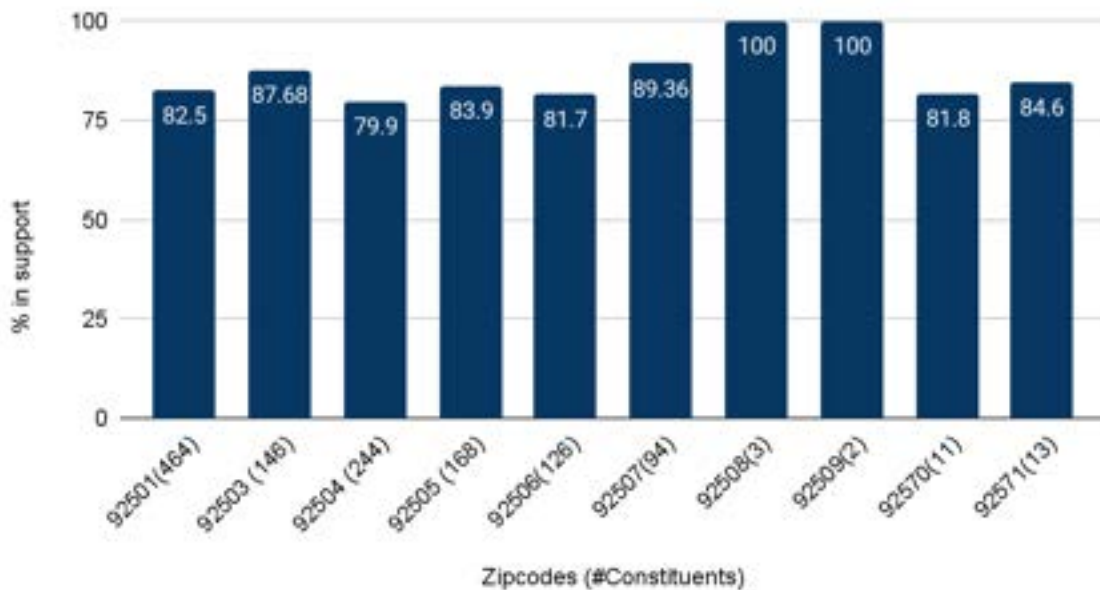
Appendices

6.1 Detailed Data Tables

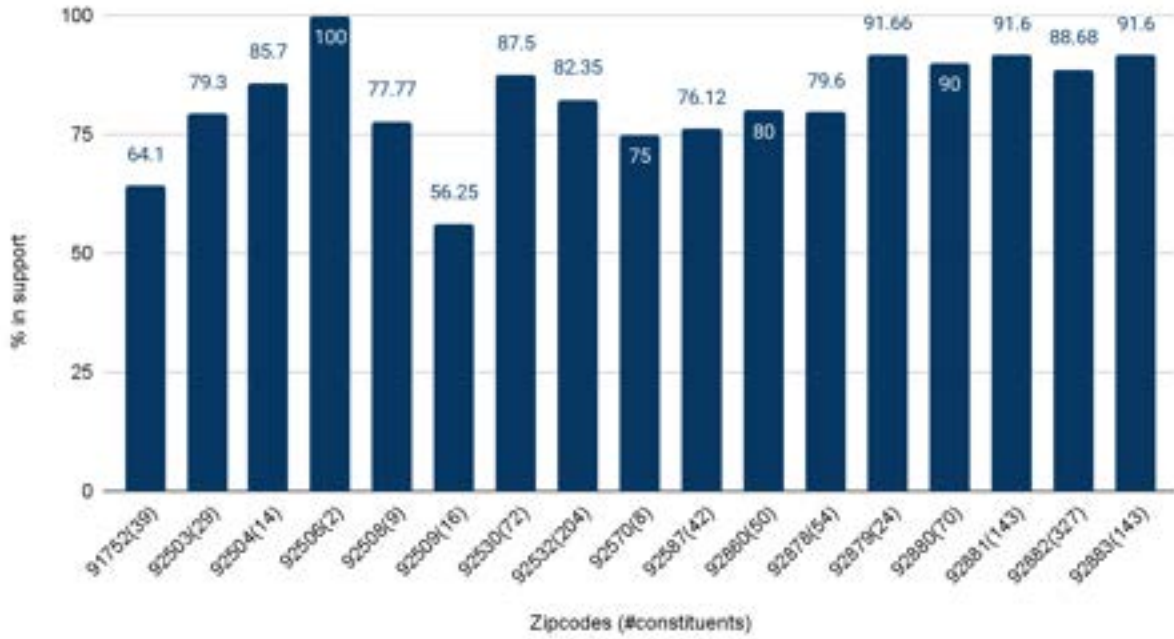
D1 Support of Oversight



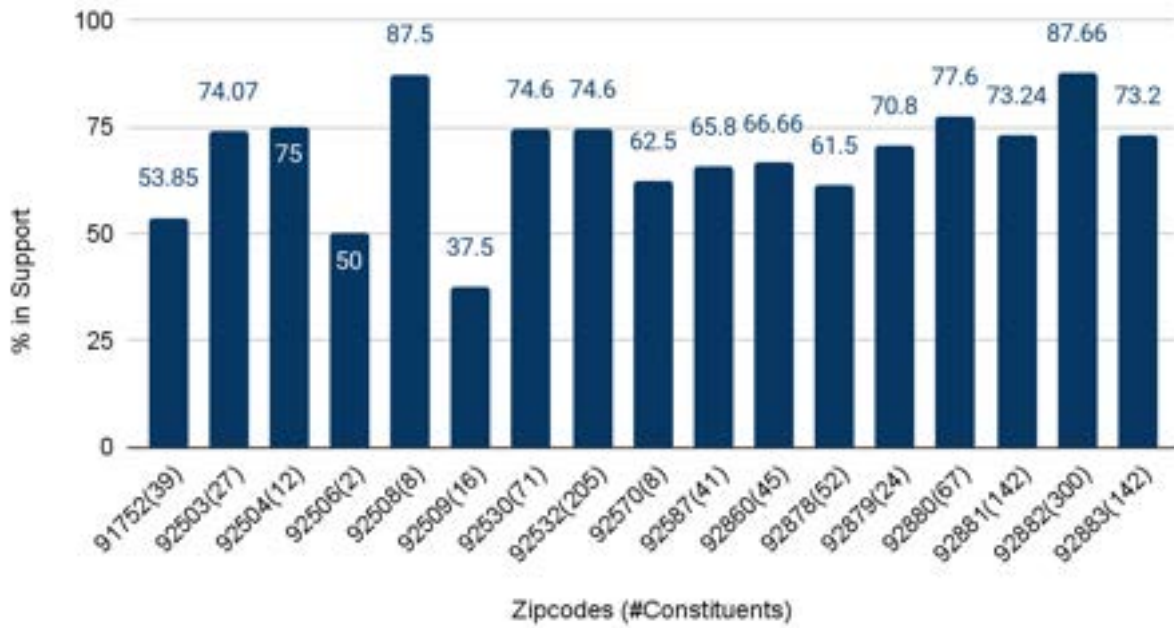
D1 Support of Separation



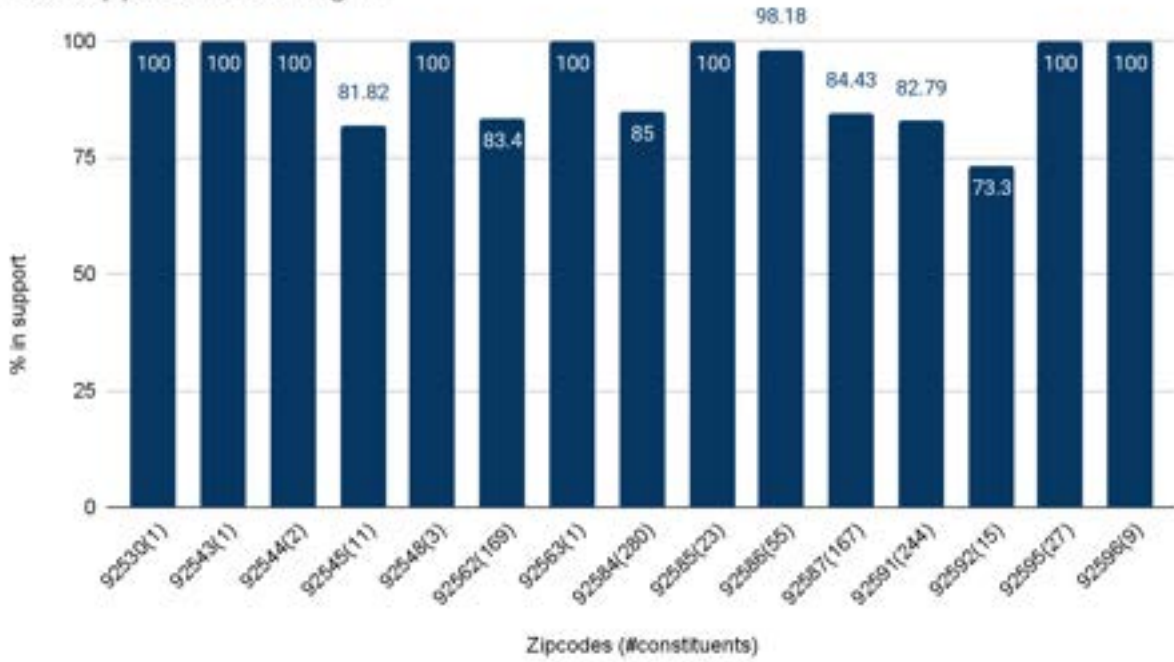
D2 Support of Oversight



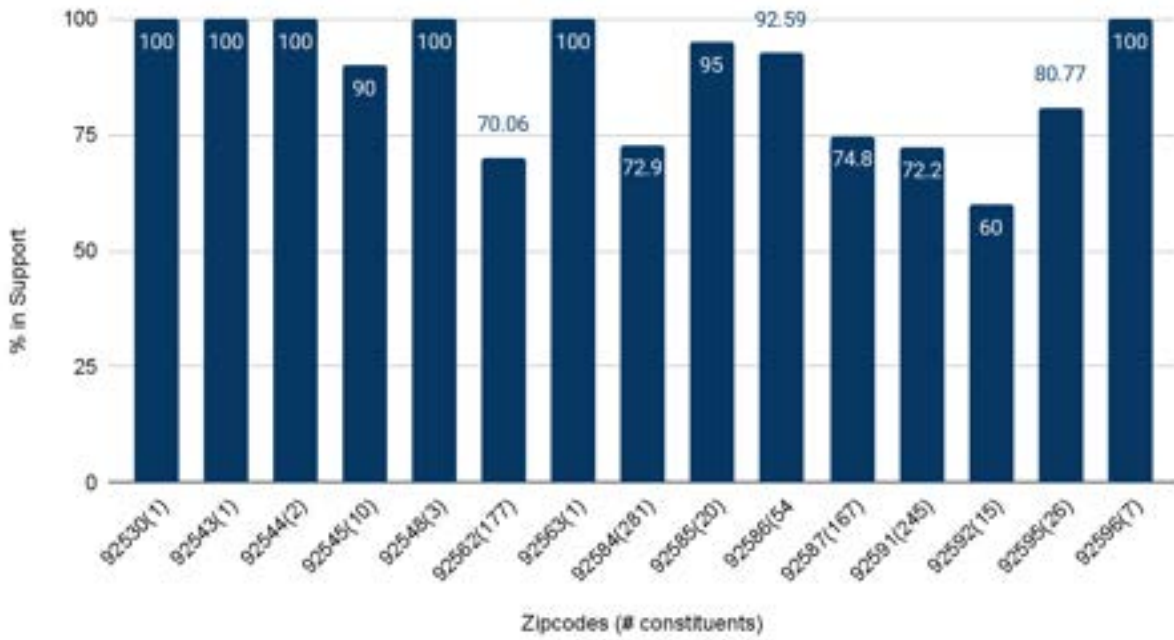
D2 Support of Separation



D3 Support of Oversight



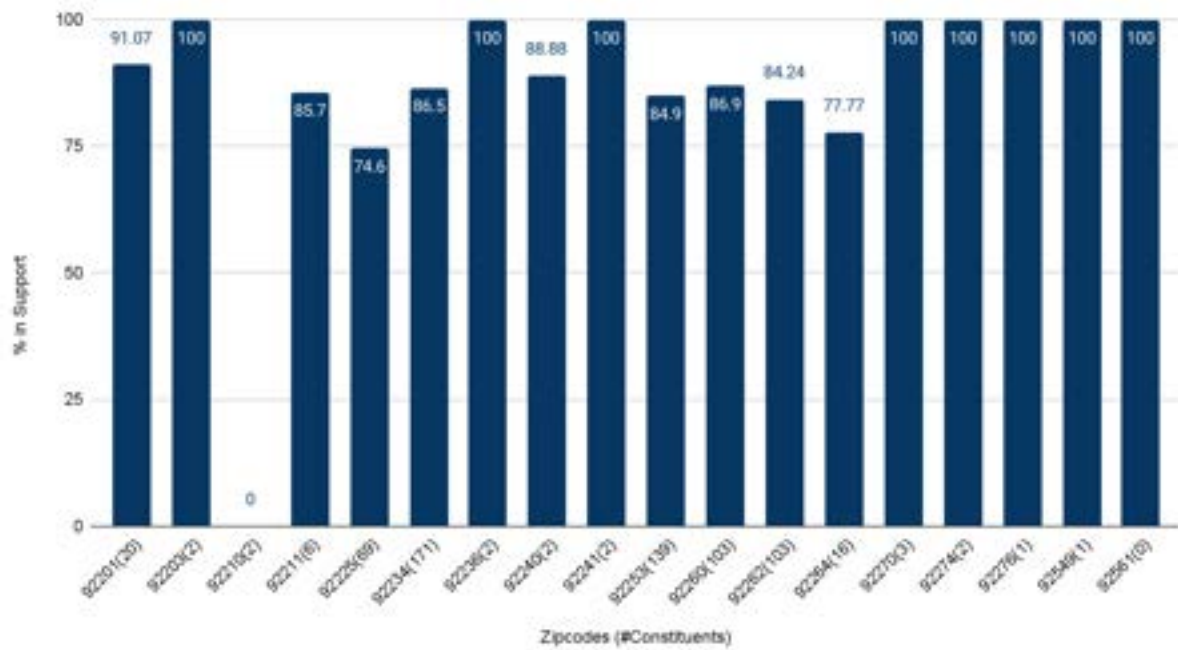
D3 Support of Separation



D4 Support of Oversight



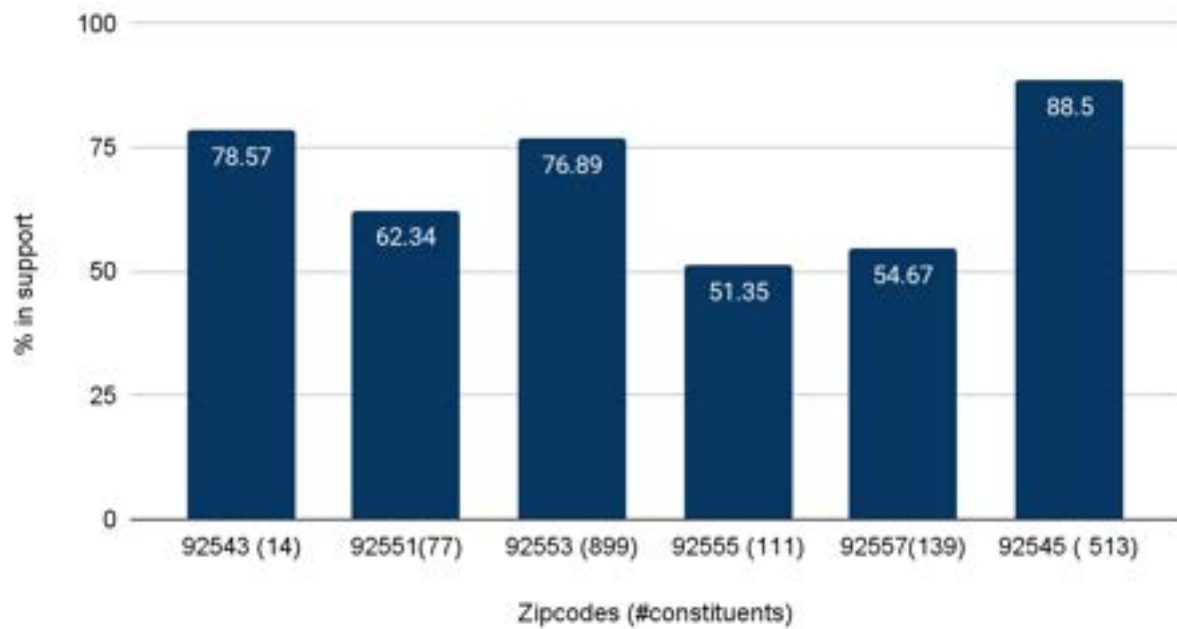
D4 Support of Separation



D5 Support of Oversight



D5 Support of Separation



6.2 Interview Guide

Interview Bank of Questions:

1. Have you heard about the growing number of deaths in Riverside County jails?
2. Transparency and accountability are key for public safety. Did you know that the sheriff department and the coroner department are the same?
3. Do you believe sheriff department accountability would be good for riverside county residents?
4. Would you support the separation of the sheriff and coroner department?
5. Would you be interested in getting more involved in efforts to hold the Sheriff department accountable?

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