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Kern High Road Coalition Releases Report Highlighting Labor Inequities in the County

Kern County, CA – A new labor market analysis by the Kern High Road Coalition finds that Kern County’s economy has not produced shared prosperity in recent decades, as workers have experienced significant wage declines and inequality.

The landscape analysis, titled “[The Future of the State: Kern County’s Young, Growing, Diverse Population and Dynamic Economy](#)”, found that workers at the middle and bottom of the wage scale have lost ground in the past two decades, experiencing an annual wage decline of nearly 10 percent. The report also showed that in 2019, 40 percent of Kern County workers earned less than a living wage, which is defined as the amount needed to avoid “consistent housing and food insecurity.”

During the same period, Kern’s economy fluctuated between extremes in terms of GDP per capita growth – it led the state from from 2000 to 2009 at 35 percent growth in GDP per capita, but then shrank by 4.4 percent in the years since – the third-worst rate in the state.

A closer look at the data shows that much of Kern’s economic expansion in the past two decades was due to population growth, which fueled a 51 percent increase in the labor market. Looking ahead, a young, diverse population will age into the workforce and dramatically reshape the labor market. High numbers of white and immigrant workers will exit the workforce, replaced by increasing numbers of native-born Latinx workers.

The “Future of the State” report highlights the need for workforce development and training for labor sectors that can provide upward mobility to Kern County families. It also raises important questions about future economic development for widespread and equitable prosperity as the county’s young, diverse and growing population ages into the workforce.

Moving forward, the Kern High Road Coalition is developing a strategy to bring high-quality jobs to Kern that address the numerous community needs that exist. You can read more about our work and find our social media at our website, which is located at www.kernhighroad.org.

Below, Kern HRC member organizations offer some statements regarding the release of the report:

"Future of the State uses data to tell an important story, that Kern County has not shared enough of its prosperity with its workers. The report is a call to action." said **Imelda Ceja-Butkiewicz, President of the Kern-Inyo-Mono Central Labor Council.**

"The findings in this report are dismal, but with ongoing community partnership led by the Kern High Road Coalition and funds hopefully coming in from the Community Economic Resilience Funds from the state, Kern County has an amazing opportunity ahead. We cannot rely on business as usual but must center frontline environmental justice communities and rank and file union membership. Continuing on the same path will result in disastrous effects for the most vulnerable among us," said **Ingrid Brostrom, Assistant Director of the Center on Race, Poverty & the Environment.**

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The Kern High Road Coalition is led by Bakersfield College, Kern Community College District, UC Merced Community and Labor Center, and the Center on Race, Poverty, & the Environment and consists of numerous labor, business, and community based organizations. The coalition received the High Roads Training Partnership from the State of California, which hopes to simultaneously address urgent questions of income inequality, economic competitiveness, and climate change through regional skills strategies designed to support economically and environmentally resilient communities across the state.