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PRESS RELEASE

*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

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**Merced County District Attorney and Local Citizens Speak with
California Attorney General Rob Bonta**

California Attorney General Rob Bonta spent yesterday touring the Central Valley, stopping to speak with constituents in Stockton, Modesto, and Merced. Attorney General Bonta met Monday evening with local leaders in business, agriculture and the medical field. District Attorney Kimberly Lewis spoke to the group, highlighting the opportunity to discuss on a State level some of the challenging issues facing Merced County:

The State budget is currently anticipating billions in surplus dollars and may be issuing tax rebate checks; the County during the last three years has requested budget reductions or status quo budgets from its department heads and doesn't anticipate immediate improvement. The State prison system is recording record low numbers for inmates and moves forward to close two State prisons; between January and October of this year Merced County released 571 individuals sentenced to local prison for felony offenses to serve their sentence on the electronic monitor because the jail does not have room to house them and no misdemeanor offenders serve jail sentences. We have a State Legislature creating diversion programs in the criminal



justice system for defendants suffering from mental health problems and for misdemeanor defendants in general, but Merced County lacks the funding to staff any programs in those areas. In the next few months, the Department of Juvenile Justice, formerly known as the California Youth Authority, will close and Merced County will be responsible for housing its youth who commit prison eligible offenses. This requirement is being shifted to a county that has no programs for youth who are involved with or at risk to become involved with gangs.



These differences are exactly why events like tonight's are so important – it's why we need to encourage more of these opportunities in the future. . . . Through dialogue, discussion, and free communication, hopefully, we can generate creative solutions to the problems and challenges facing communities like Merced County, where the standard answers have not been enough.



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