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March 20, 2025

The Honorable Vice Fong
U.S. House of Representatives
243 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20003

The Honorable Jay Obernolte
U.S. House of Representatives
2433 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: FY 2026 Community Project Funding Request for the Kern County Sheriff's Office Air Support Unit

Dear Congressman Fong and Congressman Obernolte,

I am writing on behalf of the Kern County Board of Supervisors to express our strong support for funding to purchase an additional Airbus H125 helicopter. The Kern County Sheriff's Air Support Unit is the only law enforcement air unit in the county, providing critical patrol and search-and-rescue services.

The Sheriff's Office previously relied on aging Bell OH-58 and MD500 helicopters with all but one having now been retired or repurposed. One MD500 helicopter remains in the fleet and is used for training and as a backup for aerial patrols. In 2023, two Airbus H125 helicopters were acquired for patrol and rescue operations. However, operating multiple airframes creates inefficiencies in pilot training, maintenance, and equipment compatibility. Adding a third Airbus H125 and selling the last MD500 would streamline operations, reduce costs, and ensure continuous air support.

In addition to patrol duties, each Airbus H125 is equipped with a hoist and thermal camera to aid in search and rescue operations across Kern County's vast 8,200-square-mile terrain (about the size of the State of New Jersey). A third unit would guarantee mission readiness for law enforcement and lifesaving operations.

For these reasons, I urge you to support this critical funding request and to consider the enhanced public safety and operational efficiencies it will provide for all your constituents. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Leticia Perez".

Leticia Perez, Chair
Kern County Board of Supervisors