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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Approved by 

On March 6, 2018, the Kern County District Attorney's Felony DUI/Homicide Vertical Prosecution Unit closed its 1000th case. The team consists of specially trained and experienced prosecutors that focus only on these cases. The team was formed on October 1, 2010. Since then they have prosecuted a felony DUI every 2.7 day, including holidays and weekends. The team focused on the repeat offenders, as each defendant averaged two priors. The tragic cost reflected in these case numbers was that 93 individuals were killed and another 661 injured. This does not reflect the number of impaired drivers killed or injured who could not be prosecuted because they died as well.

The unit has numerous accomplishments. Convictions were obtained in every homicide case, including twelve murder cases where the defendants received life sentences. The unit obtained the first murder conviction for cannabis impairment in California and was the first county to have oral fluid testing admitted in court. They educated hundreds of students on the danger of impaired driving through Leaders in Life and other forums. In calendar year 2010, there were a high of 4,788 DUI's filed in Kern County. That number dropped to 4,120 in 2017. Unfortunately, the number of DUI homicides has remained virtually unchanged.

Most importantly, the prosecutors assigned to the unit work in close collaboration with law enforcement partners, such as the Bakersfield Police Department Traffic Division and California Highway Patrol. The success of the program is through the joint efforts of prosecutors and these agencies working together. Funding for the program comes from a grant by the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

District Attorney Lisa Green stated, "We have come a long way over the past seven years. Victims of impaired drivers and their families now have a strong voice in the courtroom to ensure justice is served. Unfortunately, there remains a great need for this team as we have over fifty felony cases pending. Until people start making the correct choices not to drive under the influence of drugs or alcohol, the Kern County District Attorney's Office will continue to hold them accountable."