Determined to be heard, they boarded buses at 4:30 a.m. to travel to the State Capitol.

San Joaquin Valley residents participated in Equity on the Mall earlier this month, sharing issues they’re facing with stakeholders and elected officials.

The event was hosted by The Center at the Sierra Health Foundation and the San Joaquin Valley Health Fund. Activities included a rally on the West Steps of the Capitol. There was also a briefing on the new report, “California’s San Joaquin Valley: A Region and Its Children Under Stress.”

Sierra Health Foundation President and CEO Chet Hewitt says the report documents racial and health inequities and the effects they have on the lives of children and families in the San Joaquin Valley. He pointed out that one in four children in the San Joaquin Valley attend schools with unsafe drinking water and that Latino children there are 46 times more likely to attend schools with some form of pesticide exposure. There are also high rates of obesity and food insecurity.

“We know we can do better for our children and their families,” Hewitt said.

Organizers say that for far too long, communities across the Valley haven’t had access to the same opportunities “that make California golden for other regions.” The report also addresses issues including domestic violence, immigration, education, environmental justice, housing, community safety and sustainable agriculture.

Also sharing remarks during the briefing were Assemblymember Tony Thurmond and Stockton Mayor Michael Tubbs.

Assemblyman Thurmond, who is African American, greeted audience members in English and Spanish, thanking those who created the report as well as those whose concerns and issues form its findings. He thanked them for “lifting up the message of health and public health.” Thurmond says it’s important that all Californians be free on environmental hazards and have access to quality health care no matter where they live.

“We are living in an unusual time when there are those who are threatening our health care system,” Thurmond shared. “They want to take away the Affordable Care Act at a time when California has grown the number of people who are insured dramatically more than any other state and we can’t stand for that. We want to make sure every citizen in California has health care and we will continue fight to protect it,” he added.

Mayor Tubbs says the issues brought up in the report aren’t new to many who call the San Joaquin Valley home.

“The only thing that surprises me about the report is the lack of moral outrage,” Tubbs shared. “In the 21st century in the Golden State it’s ridiculous when one in three children live in poverty. That’s criminal, that’s crazy. When one in four children go to school with unsafe drinking water, that’s criminal, that’s crazy,” he said.

Mayor Tubbs spoke about how to go from “report to action.” Talking and commiserating, he says, aren’t enough. He encouraged Equity on the Mall participants and advocates to educate themselves on the data and go back to their communities and take findings to officials there.

“If we don’t, it’s not Trump’s fault, it’s not the governor’s fault, it’s our fault,” Tubbs said. “We can’t allow ourselves to continue to talk about how the Valley is struggling and not give people a comprehensive roadmap as to how to fix it,” he added.

The “California’s San Joaquin Valley: A Region and Its Children Under Stress” report can be downloaded online at http://www.shfcenter.org/sjvhf/equity-on-the-mall.