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GOVERNOR

## **New Mexico Land Grant Council**

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September 15, 2025

Honorable Subcommittee Chairman Tom Tiffany  
United States House of Representatives  
Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Federal Lands  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Tiffany,

The New Mexico Land Grant Council expresses its support for the passage of H.R. 4284, the “Small Cemetery Conveyance Act.” This Act will provide an important mechanism for returning decades and centuries -old community cemeteries to the ownership and management of local communities. There are at least eighteen known land grant-merced community cemeteries located on federally managed public lands and National Forest System lands in New Mexico. These cemeteries hold both historical significance and spiritual value for our communities. They are the final resting places of our ancestors, and some of these cemeteries are still in active use today.

It is unfortunate that most of these cemeteries fell into the federal land management system unintentionally because of the land adjudication process that followed the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848. Returning these cemeteries to the proper ownership of the local communities is long overdue and it will provide for better management, maintenance and protection. Who better to care for these sacred places than the descendants of the individuals buried in them. This bill is an important step forward in properly recognizing the relationship between land grant-merced communities and their former common lands now managed by the federal government. The State of New Mexico has for over 20 years recognized the local government authority of land grant-mercedes as political subdivisions of the State. The New Mexico Legislature has bolstered the State’s land grant statutes and has provided the necessary resources for today’s land grant-mercedes to successfully govern themselves and properly serve their local communities. There has never been a better time than now for the federal government to relinquish control of these historic and culturally significant sites back to their communities of origin.

Lastly, the Council is happy to see that the bill includes a provision that gives the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to waive the conveyance costs of these community cemeteries. This is an important tool that can spare local communities the insult of a financial burden for reacquiring these sacred spaces, that in many cases were wrongfully removed from their control.

For all of the above-mentioned reasons Council respectfully requests that subcommittee pass H.R. 4284, so that it may continue on to the next step in the legislative process. Thank you!

Con todo respeto,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Juan Sánchez", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Juan Sánchez  
Chair  
New Mexico Land Grant Council