



El Consejo de las Mercedes
P.O. Box 51865
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Mercedes September 15, 2025

Abiquiú United States House of Representatives
Anton Chico Committee on Natural Resources
Arroyo Hondo Arriba Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Atrisco 1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Cañón de Carnué

Cebolleta

Chih'ene Nde Nation

Chilili

Cristobal de La Serna

Cubero

Don Fernando de Taos

Juan Bautista Baldez

Los Vigiles

Lower Gallinas

Nuestra Señora del Rosario
San Fernando y Santiago
(Truchas)

San Antonio de
Las Huertas

San Antonio del
Río Colorado

San Joaquín del
Río de Chama

San Miguel del Bado

Sangre de Cristo Land
Rights Council

Santa Bárbara

Santa Cruz de
la Cañada

Santo Tomás Apóstol
del Río de Trampas

La Joya de Sevilleta

Tajique

Tecolote

Tierra Amarilla

Torreón

Town of Tomé

Dear Mr. Chairman Tom Tiffany and Congressman Joe Neguse, Ranking Member,
House Subcommittee on Federal Lands:

El Consejo de las Mercedes offers this letter in support of H.R. 4284, the **Small Cemetery Conveyance Act**. We are a statewide, grassroots land grant organization with a membership of more than two dozen Spanish and Mexican community land grants-mercedes. Since its founding in 2006, El Consejo has promoted land grant-merced interests at both the state and federal level, advocating for legislative and administrative policies that address the past injustices experienced by land grants-mercedes. Land grants-mercedes were granted by the Spanish Crown and Mexican Republic since the 1690s and represent the oldest non-Native American permanent settlements and the oldest democratic institutions in North America. Many of our land grant communities were settled by *genízaro* (detrribalized Native American) and *mestizo* (mixed race) populations.

As community land grants-mercedes, we were granted thousands of acres that included common lands with vast natural resources used to sustain these communities and their residents. These lands were used for fuelwood and timber to heat and build their homes, to pasture livestock, and included water resources they developed to irrigate their crops, as well as flora and fauna for medicinal purposes and nourishment. Equally important among these uses were lands used for religious purposes, including *iglesias* (churches), *capillas* (chapels), *santuarios* (shrines) and *camposantos* (cemeteries), the subject of this very important bill.

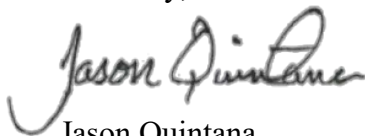
Land grants lost their common lands to the United States through a corrupt adjudication process that aimed to clear title to Spanish and Mexican grant lands. This necessary process was required by the Articles 8 and 10 of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848, but did not protect the title and property rights of these communities as it was supposed to do. The process was ripe for speculation, failing to protect from the designs of land speculators, unethical attorneys and corrupt federal and territorial officials when these claims were heard by the Office of the Surveyor General for New Mexico and the Court of Private Land Claims. The Surveyor General and the Court failed to properly consider Spanish and Mexican law in their decisions and common lands of community land grants became part of the public domain, including portions that were included in newly established federal forest reserves.

The U.S. Forest Service expanded these reserves by purchasing stolen land grant common land from land speculators and corporations and continued restricting local community access. Many of these lands were purchased in the 1920s and by the 1930s that process accelerated through New Deal Programs like the Farm Security Administration and the Soil Conservation Service, which aimed to restore access to these land dependent communities. When projects were discontinued, the lands were transferred to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management and they again limited access, contributing not to the continued impoverishment and depopulation of many land grant-merced communities. These access restrictions inhibited our rights to maintain the sacred *camposantos* where we buried our ancestors and placed upon federal agencies the responsibility to issue permits for every single burial on active cemeteries on federal lands.

H.R. 4284 is an important piece of legislation to land grants-mercedes that are surrounded by federal lands, land grants like the Merced de Santo Tomás Apóstol del Río de Las Trampas (aka the Trampas Land Grant), whose communities have been *completely surrounded* by forest system lands since their stolen lands were purchased by the U.S. Forest Service in 1926. Enveloped by the Carson National Forest, communities on this grant have maintained small farm tracts since Las Trampas was established in 1751. The high elevation (~7,500 ft.) creates short growing seasons, obliging communities to work hard to maintain the small arable tracts for agriculture, leaving no room for creating new cemeteries. This single land grant has *three* cemeteries on forest system lands: the Las Trampas, El Valle and Chamisal Community Cemeteries. This legislation would allow their transfer to the Las Trampas Land Grant, which is a political subdivision of the State of New Mexico.

We respectfully ask that the House Subcommittee on Federal Lands and the Natural Resources Committee support H.R. 4284, allowing our land grant-merced communities to continue to maintain our cemeteries and pay proper respect to our ancestors.

Sincerely,



Jason Quintana
President

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El Consejo de las Mercedes is a statewide grassroots land grant organization with a membership of more than two dozen Spanish and Mexican community land grant-mercedes and the Chihene Nde Nation (Warm Springs Apache Nation) of New Mexico. Since its founding in 2006, the Consejo has promoted land grant-merced interests at both the state and federal level, advocating for legislative and administrative policies that address injustices that land grant-mercedes have experienced.

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