

Chairman Takano, Subcommittee Chair Luria, Ranking Member Roe, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Allison Adelle Hedge Coke and I am here to testify on behalf of the University of California Riverside in support of the draft bill to permit the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to establish a grant program to conduct cemetery research and produce educational materials for the Veterans Legacy Program. I am a poet/writer and Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing within the College of Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at UCR and the Principal Investigator of the Along the Chaparral: memorializing the enshrined Legacy Program project.

We, as human beings, live in narrativising culture/s. If you can imagine story as a spherical, continually evolving multidimensional entity, that we in respective cultures intersect with in seasonal, tribute, and on as need to know basis extrapolations, and throughout time co-create story fabric to continually educate and memorialize our knowledges, cosmogonies, and histories, it is easy to deduct that story and culture are inextricable and are the common thread of knowledges worldwide.

The site we are working with, Riverside National Cemetery, represents a critical dimension of life in our region and its intersections nationally and globally. It represents honor and service, the ulterior hope for non-conflict, for peace, local, regional, national and global peace, and the hope for greater remarkable lives that continually add to the story and whereas the surrounding populations have at stake value from kinships interred there, from community relationships and temporal markers that give us reason to work together to do better in this world as human beings.

Bringing UCR students undergraduates and MFA/PhD candidates and recent alumni into the classrooms to foster this programming encourages K-12 students to look to education as a solution to economic deprivation and greater success in their futures and has also encouraged K-12 teachers, TAs and substitutes to seek graduate degrees in the short time we have been implementing the program. In almost

every classroom, a good third of the youth have significant ties to the cemetery they may not realize until the project is on their desk and then give themselves to discovery of family and neighborhood ties they belong to and are represented through in this site.

Story creates culture, it teaches us who we are and how to be in the world and we co-create the entity with our own live experiences and knowledges from those who came before us and who lead us in our futures. The Legacy Program delivers this terrific meeting of story and culture to the university, to K-12 schools, to the surrounding cultures, communities, that make up our region and homes us in knowledge we glean from the site and our storying of these lives.

Our region includes nineteen Indigenous nations. The site of the cemetery includes historical and contemporary relevance to Luiseño, Tongva, Cahuilla, Serrano, and numerous other peoples, including Native Veterans and dependents interred from nationals throughout the hemisphere and island nations. Native nations have a very high rate of military service to the United States and, of course, a continual infinite commitment to protecting the homelands of original peoples these nations belong to.

The region is also long-term homelands to Latino/a/x, Chicano, Califas, Hispanic and Luso communities, also bearing a very high rate of military service nationally whether from generations that have lived here more traditionally to new citizen immigrants from Latin American countries who often dutifully serve to demonstrate their belief in the citizenship, as can be recognized by service from people originally from island nations who have also become citizens and have served at higher rates than other communities within our region.

It is fair to say that in addition to commitment to original homelands and citizenship, due to economic hardships endured within these communities, the rate of service is also higher within these and other communities represented in this site. It is fair to add that in times of conflict, some of these communities have been culled fully for frontline service, which includes Casa Blanca community of Riverside, whereas the first Medal of Honor recipient, and first interred person, reinterred from an earlier, segregated burial to be honored at rest in the Riverside National Cemetery, Riverside's own Ysmael "Smiley" Villegas, was born into and lived until he was killed in action in World War II.

In collaboration with the Veterans Legacy Program of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration, and in tribute to those interred at Riverside National Cemetery, to

address and begin to interpret the story of Riverside National Cemetery, Along the Chaparral: memorializing the enshrined project services have included creation of an interactive GiS Web App and cutting edge (.7 of an inch aerial filming) digital mapping for the Riverside National Cemetery (RNC) site with populated points affiliating hundreds of resulting K-12 tribute stories to gravestones in the site, with informational overlays decoding the site's rich construction, monuments, history and contemporary notes of interest, including Native American presence and intentional encoding with flora related to military life, and a search and sorting system that highlights significant variables, including honors and citations received.

We have already published a selected works anthology of over 70 K-12 student works. We produced two documentary film archives, including a making of the project documentary of participating K-12 students and teachers, UCR students, faculty, and Veterans, and eight portrait vignettes with survivors of K-12 student story subjects interred at RNC.

We have produced five K-12 student performances and a nationally/internationally broadcast radio play memorializing the enshrined at RNC and are working with RNC to launch the first Legacy Day at Riverside National Cemetery in the first week of October 2019.

We also produced dozens of lesson plans during this period and have a very good handle on a curriculum base. To date, we have worked successfully and collaboratively with over 2700 K-12 students in approximately 100 classrooms (six to eight sessions each class) in several public-school districts in our city and county and with Sherman Indian High School, whereas the project also produced an ongoing related Veterans mural project.

Too, the project fostered an understanding for UCR Tomás Rivera Library research collections to serve as receptacle for public access of memorabilia donated to Riverside National Cemetery by loved ones,

survivors, and next of kin. This adds to public access of those items, allows safe housing of articles, allows RNC to have a place to hold, and allows UCR to meet storytelling of Riverside County Inland Empire Research Librarian Goals.

The project is web-housed on <<https://alongthechaparral.ucr.edu>>.

The pilot project was a result of bridging partnership from UCR to Riverside Unified School District, Beaumont Unified School District, Temecula Valley Unified School District, Sherman Indian High School and regional efforts and from February 2018-November 2018 included K-12 tutelage and interface and programming with roughly 2000 K-12 students and 12 interred survivors and the following persons and entities were engaged within the project:

UCR Graduate Student Fellows:

- Isabela Agosa, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Clark Barclay, MFA Candidate Writing for the Performing Arts
- JT LaChausse, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Christiaan Clark, PhD Candidate Digital Composition
- Ian Galbraith, PhD Candidate English
- Joanna Greenberg, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Katy Gurin, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Jessica Gutierrez Masini, PhD Candidate Ethnomusicology
- Robyn Johnson, PhD Candidate English
- Cristina Leyva, MFA Candidate Experimental Choreography
- Josh Little, PhD Candidate History
- Will Madrigal, PhD Candidate Ethnic Studies
- Lauren Mauldin, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Alicia Mosley-Marks, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Daisy Ocampo, PhD Candidate History
- Michael Robinson, MFA Candidate Writing for the Performing Arts
- Jasmine Smith, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Chelsea Sutton, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Kathleen Taylor, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Fernanda Vidaurrazaga, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Amanda Wixon, PhD Candidate History

UCR Undergraduate Fellows:

- Riann Kaibetoney, Global Studies

- Harley Grow, Theater, Film, and Digital Production

UCR Alumni Fellows/K12 Teachers/School Staff:

- Ashanti Anderson, Alumna, UCR MFA Creative Writing
- Jalyn Barnard, Martin Luther King Jr High School, RUSD
- Amie Charney, Alumna, UCR MFA Creative Writing, Chaparral High School, TVUSD
- Karlene Clifford, School Counselor, SIHS
- Carol Damgen, Alumna, UCR MFA Creative Writing
- Don Forhane, Chaparral High School, TVUSD
- Julie Frias, Gage Middle School, RUSD
- Sonja Grover, Chaparral High School, TVUSD
- Travis Hedge Coke, Alumnus, UCR MFA Creative Writing
- Kevin LeDuc, Martin Luther King Jr High School, RUSD
- Kolkakada “Julie” Pheng, Alumna, UCR Theater and Film
- Paige Polcene, Highland Academy, BUSD
- Christine Pollitt, Gage Middle School, RUSD
- Leslie Robertson, Central Middle School, RUSD
- Lorene Sisquoc, Cultural Traditions and Museum, SIHS
- Jasmine Smith, Lead Teacher Highland Academy, BUSD
- Riley Takano, Martin Luther King Jr High School, RUSD
- Abel Valencia, Alumnus, UCR Theater and Film
- Carol Yarborough, Central Middle School, RUSD

UCR Staff:

- Kat Koziar, UCR Data Librarian, Point Person for Grant Projects, Along the Chaparral Program Coordinating Partner
- UCR Research Librarians Brian Geiger & David Rios
- UCR Alumni James Cabrera & Kyle Gebelin, and Charles Farrar, Silvana Payne & Teresa Salvato
- Joshua Gonzales, Native American Student Programs, Director
- Kathleen DeAtley, Performing Arts College, CHASS support staff members
- ArtsBlock staff, Linda Christopher & Carolyn Power, RUSD

Vendors:

- Shane Brown, Mike Cohen, Royce Sharp & Cati Porter, Inlandia, Aerial Graphics, Esri

UCR Co-Investigators and Mentor Professors:

- Assistant Professor Emily Rapp Black, Co-PI, Memoirist, Creative Writing
- Assistant Professor Gerald Clarke, Co-PI, Cahuilla Tribal Council Member, Artist, Ethnic Studies
- Professor Katie Ford, Co-PI, Poet, Creative Writing
- Associate Professor Rebecca “Monte” Kugel, Co-PI, History
- Assistant Professor Wesley Leonard, Co-PI, Indigenous Languages Linguist, Ethnic Studies

- Associate Professor Jaqueline Shea Murphy, Co-PI, Indigenous Dance
- Associate Professor Robert Perez, Co-PI, Latino and Indigenous Studies, Ethnic Studies
- Associate Professor Michelle Raheja, Co-PI, Native Literature, Film, Visual Culture, English
- Associate Professor Jonathan Ritter, Co-PI, Latino Ethnomusicology, Music
- Distinguished Professor Susan Straight, Co-PI, Novelist, Memoirist, Creative Writing
- Distinguished Professor, Rupert Costo Chair of Indian Affairs, Clifford Trafzer, Co-PI, History
- Distinguished Professor, Principal Investigator & Director, Allison Adelle Hedge Coke, Poet, Writer, Performer, Filmmaker, Narrative Medicine Practitioner

From December 15, 2018 to this date, in the first year of a new contract, dating December 15, 2018 – December 14, 2019 (with a second year from December 15, 2019 – December 14, 2020 optional), the new contract currently includes the participation of the following persons and entities:

UC RIVERSIDE in Collaboration with the Veterans Legacy Program of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Cemetery Administration, and in tribute to those interred at Riverside National Cemetery Along the Chaparral: memorializing the enshrined recently entered into a new two-year project in collaboration with Riverside Unified School District, Beaumont Unified School District, Sherman Indian High School and extended regional community efforts and includes K-12 tutelage and interface and supporting programming beginning with (to date) 700 K-12 students:

UCR Graduate Student Fellows:

- Christiaan Clark, PhD Candidate Digital Composition
- Brenda Delfino MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Nicole Furtado, PhD Candidate English
- Joanna Greenberg, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Celeste Jackson, PhD Candidate English
- Cristina Leyva, MFA Candidate Experimental Choreography
- Josh Little, PhD Candidate History
- Alicia Mosley-Marks, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Jessica Gutierrez Masini, PhD Candidate Ethnomusicology
- Beyaja Notah, PhD Candidate Ethnic Studies
- Daisy Ocampo, PhD Candidate History
- Crystal Salas, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Jasmine Smith, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Chelsea Sutton, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Fernanda Vidaurrazaga, MFA Candidate Creative Writing
- Amanda Wixon, PhD Candidate History

#### UCR Alumni Fellows/K12 Teachers/School Staff:

- Jalyn Barnard, Martin Luther King Jr High School, RUSD
- Karlene Clifford, School Counselor, SIHS
- Carol Damgen, Alumna, UCR MFA Creative Writing
- Julie Frias, Gage Middle School, RUSD
- Jessica Jimenez, Martin Luther King Jr High School, RUSD
- Travis Hedge Coke, Alumnus, UCR MFA Creative Writing
- Kevin LeDuc, Martin Luther King Jr High School, RUSD
- Paige Polcene, Highland Academy, BUSD
- Christine Pollitt, Gage Middle School, RUSD
- Lorene Sisquoc, Cultural Traditions and Museum, SIHS
- Jasmine Smith, Lead Teacher Highland Academy, BUSD
- Riley Takano, Martin Luther King Jr High School, RUSD
- Courtney Temple, Martin Luther King Jr High School, RUSD

#### UCR Undergraduate Fellows

- Production Assistants: Johnny Moon, Jiasi Lai (Emily), and Harley Grow Hernandez.
- Emily Clarke, a Cahuilla poet and undergraduate in Creative Writing joining us to provide K-12 Fall classroom outreach, near her home, in Anza schools.

#### UCR Staff:

- Kat Koziar, UCR Data Librarian, Point Person for Grant Projects, Along the Chaparral Program Coordinating Partner
- UCR Research Librarians Brian Geiger & David Rios
- Joshua Gonzales, Native American Student Programs, Director
- Kathleen DeAtley, Performing Arts College, CHASS support staff members
- ArtsBlock staff, Nicolay Masov and Amy Metcalf
- Pr. Sergio Rey, Public Policy, Director of Geospatial Sciences, Center for Geospatial Sciences

#### Training session by:

- Rebecca “Monte” Kugel, Associate Professor History

#### Radio hosting by:

- Robert Perez, Associate Professor Ethnic Studies

#### Vendors:

- Shane Brown, Mike Cohen, Aerial Graphics, Esri & Cati Porter, Inlandia

UCR Co-Investigators and Mentor Professors:

- Associate Professor Emily Rapp Black, Co-PI, Memoirist, Creative Writing
- Professor Katie Ford, Co-PI, Poet, Creative Writing
- Assistant Professor Wesley Leonard, Co-PI, Indigenous Languages Linguist, Ethnic Studies
- Assistant Professor Keun-Pyo “Root” Park, Co-PI, Filmmaker, Theater, Film, Digital Media
- Associate Professor Michelle Raheja, Co-PI, Native Literature, Film, Visual Culture, English
- Associate Professor Jonathan Ritter, Co-PI, Latino Ethnomusicology, Music
- Distinguished Professor Susan Straight, Co-PI, Novelist, Memoirist, Creative Writing
- Distinguished Professor, Rupert Costo Chair of Indian Affairs, Clifford Trafzer, Co-PI, History
- Distinguished Professor Principal Investigator & Director, Allison Adelle Hedge Coke, Poet, Writer, Performer, Filmmaker, Narrative Medicine Practitioner

Along the Chaparral: memorializing the enshrined offers special thanks to:

Bryce Carpenter, Program Manager, Legacy Program, National Cemetery Administration, U. S.

Department of Veterans Affairs; Peter Young, Director Riverside National Cemetery; Craig Arsell,

Assistant Director Riverside National Cemetery; Adriene Benton, Assistant Director Riverside National

Cemetery; Beverly Newsome, Riverside National Cemetery; Paul Adkins, Riverside National Cemetery

Support Committee; and Daisy Tate, Veterans Supplemental Support.

Riverside Unified School District support team Linda Christopher & Carolyn Power

UCR project support teams, including Randall Black, Lauren Savord, Ursula Prins, Sharon Shanahan,

Regina Hazlinger, Nelda S Thomas, Linda Phi-Nguyen, Ryan Lipinski, Cindy Williams, Kiril Tomoff,

Stephanie May and Robert Chan.

UCR Department and Centers, including chairs, advisors, and directors of the MFA in Creative Writing

and Writing for the Performing Arts, Creative Writing, Dance, English, Ethnic Studies, History,

Indigenous Studies, Latino Studies, Music, Theater, Film, and Digital Production, California Center for

Native Nations, Native American Student Programs, UCR Veterans Resource Center, Riverside Unified

School District, Beaumont Unified School District, Temecula Valley Unified School District, Sherman



Indian High School and all other participating K-12 schools and communities and to King High Remembers oral history programming.

To the fantastic youth community that we have the privilege of serving and to each and all of our collaborators.

These projects have experienced immense success. They have served and are serving the greater community

The relative products, our project creates are specifically intended to memorialize, and honor Veterans and dependents interred. The narratives highlight the lives before, during, and (potentially) following service within the military. These lives are essential microcosms and macrocosms of all that is citizenry of the United States with an assembly of diverse ethnicities, walks of life and temporal era. The multitude of nearly 300,000 graves hold the remains from service in numerous conflicts and serve an area representing a 70-mile physical radius around Riverside National Cemetery. A short visit to the site (in person or online) is demonstrative of the wealth of potential life narrative from those first interred to burials from as recently as this week.

Villegas' placement in the Riverside National Cemetery encourages public respect and keeps him in fresh memory. Leadership groups, such as the Mexican American Historical Society, on what would have been his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday (2014), honored Villegas on site.

His son came to the recent Medal of Honor Day tribute at Riverside National Cemetery and two of our K-12 students read from their tribute story to honor him during the same ceremony.

<<https://www.pe.com/2014/03/15/riverside-medal-of-honor-recipient-honored/>> He is memorialized in sculpture across from City Hall, on the promenade in Riverside.

<<http://www.riversideca.gov/mayor/pdf/inclusive-community-statement.pdf>> His position in the

cemetery remains a constant sign of respect. With his final resting place highlighted in Riverside National Cemetery, he and his courageous sacrifice will never be forgotten.

The story of Villegas' life is valued and brings to mind the local 20-year-old soldier, nicknamed *Smiley* who gave his life while leading his squad during World War II, who was struck and killed on the Ville Verde Trail while singlehandedly emptying out five enemy foxholes with fortitude and honorable field competence and by his undaunted leadership, under heavy artillery, encouraging his troop to continue ahead.

Cherryie C Hein, PVT US Army, her Veteran husband Henry Gayhart Hein and their Veteran son are all interred at this site. Cherryie was a Cherokee Nation Citizen from Tahlequah Oklahoma who attended Sherman Indian School in Riverside, California before enlisting. After her service and marriage, she and her husband spent their post-service careers working for the VA Hospital. She is one of many interred people at the site who has a relationship with Sherman and our participating students there.

Hannah Fixico, a groundbreaking Rosebud Sioux woman who served honorably in the Navy during WWII and lived in Bell (an incorporated township in Los Angeles), is interred here.

There are scores of fascinating individuals, of heroes of all types in this respected place. Most people of a certain age remember the song, "The Lion Sleeps Tonight." The Tokens member, Mitch Margo, was only fourteen years old when he and his buddies recorded the song. He later served in the Army (1969-1972) and was a lifelong artist, musician, composer, and producer. <

<http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-mitch-margo-20171201-story.html>>

Margo was recently lain to rest, as well, in Riverside National Cemetery, after passing away at age 70.

He should be remembered, not only for one act or one achievement, but for his life.

Dorothy "Dottie" Ellen Ehlers, widow of Walter D. Ehlers, medal of Honor Recipient who served at Omaha Beach on D-Day (buried Riverside National Cemetery 2014) was laid to rest with her husband in

Riverside National Cemetery on January 5, 2018. She was an accomplished seamstress, quilter, doll maker, pianist, and homemaker, as well as a devoted wife and mother. By invitation, Medal of Honor recipient Walter D. Ehlers (1921 - 2014), son Walter "David" Ehlers Jr., daughter Catherine Ehlers, and Mrs. Dorothy Ehlers met with Walt Disney after personal remarks at a special presentation of "Great Moments with Mr. Lincoln" on Disney's last day to officially visit the Magic Kingdom. Ehlers later served as a Disneyland Security officer in the early 1980's. His remarks, when invited to speak to school children on D-Day, always included, "It was 60 times worse than *Saving Private Ryan*."

<https://www.disneyavenue.com/2016/10/the-story-of-walt-disneys-final.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBJ6BOEb-aI>

Our Pacific Island, Asian and Asian-American community is vibrant and the cemetery represents many diverse features of this great population, as well. Including, Indigenous Pacific Islanders, Japanese-American, Chinese-American, Korean-American, Pinay/Pinoy and many more diverse communities who include long-term citizenry and service and more recent immigration and service.

The challenges faced within these communities include internments of families and property seizures, during wartimes, due to prejudices, fears, and misunderstandings of these communities yet this national cemetery demonstrates the resiliency and commitment to honor and pride of the community.

Including that demonstrated through the story of James Mayeda, PFC US Army (1920-2015), who was born in Brawley, California, lived in Riverside most of his life, and was interned at a Japanese-American internment camp in Poston Arizona during World War II, where he met his future wife, Helen Tomiko Mayeda (originally from San Bernadino), who he later married and then enlisted in military service.

They spent 72 years together, she passed on February 15, 2015 and is interred in Riverside National Cemetery and he followed her soon after on March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015 and joined her at the same cemetery.

UCR houses an archive of Tuskegee Airmen and there are several of that famously honorable cadre interred in this site that make remarkable subjects of story and critical studies of race relations and pride. One of our participating graduate fellow's mother unexpectedly died during our pilot year project. An African American woman who was a World War II Veteran, who served in Europe sorting mail for active duty soldiers in the field, ran a soul food restaurant, and a dress shop, and was a great singer and was interred in the site during our pilot year. PFC Catherine "Julia" Harris.

K-12 teachers, participating UCR alumni and K-12 students often unexpectedly lost parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and neighbors during our project and these stories also represent the continual connections national cemeteries have to their surrounding communities and the story of life represented in each.

These are all remarkable people; easily relatable. The narratives of the lives revered here make excellent sources for stories for the K-12 students to research and write and moreover to know and share. To learn the value of factual research, to craft engaging factual story, to work in innovative storytelling media, to revise and edit and make publishable works, to satisfy so many goals in education and to unite the youth with a nearby host university and the site that the story is reamed from and tribute toward to extend the memory of these Veterans and their dependents for all time.

Challenges with contract versus grant include the university system in CHASS, formulated to address a more typical faculty grant system, whereas calls for proposals give a generous length of response and proposal submission and the calls are released to coincide well within an academic program year. The initial Legacy Program call came during Winter holiday, whereas to step up as PI, I was left to create the contract without regular support of primary contacts within the university. The second call also came within a holiday week in November, so to write both contract proposals, my major holidays in 2017 and 2018 were sacrificed and I was without the ability to continue planning dialogue with participating K-12 schools, also on holiday. Too, the time given to allow our established system to function was so unusual to the university research financial officials, some were left in disbelief and

dutifully pressed to meet the unexpected demand. unexpected demand.

If the university has a grant, opposed to a contract, the system is set up as a draw down for a grant, so at the end of each month, the university has a draw down electronic system service. In a contract the payment to the university is not paid until the end of the project. Thus, the grant would allow for more fluid and regular payments and service paid as served and would allow greater ease of ability of institutional service.

A grant program would solve most, if not all of these dilemmas and ease our collaborative work.

Mr. Chairman, I know that you are a strong advocate for Veterans, for quality education, a great friend to UCR, to universities everywhere, and UCR and I truly thank you for all of your support. I know you are a champion of Veterans and have worked diligently to support UCR Veteran students and the Veterans Legacy Program. Our community sends their gratitude for meeting with our student Veterans and allowing us opportunity to share a bit about this program with Randy Reeves, the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs. Again, UCR and I thank you for your efforts.

I would be delighted to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

With respect,

Allison Adelle Hedge Coke, Distinguished Professor, UC Riverside