



Statement By

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Before the

**Subcommittee for Indigenous Peoples of the United States
Committee on Natural Resources
House of Representatives**

Legislative Hearing

H.R. 4495, To authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services, acting through the Director of the Indian Health Service, to acquire private land to facilitate access to the Desert Sage Youth Wellness Center in Hemet, California, and for other purposes.

February 5, 2020

Good afternoon, Chairman Gallego, Ranking Member Cook, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am Randy Grinnell, Deputy Director for Management Operations of the Indian Health Service (IHS). Thank you for the opportunity to discuss H.R. 4495, to authorize the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS), acting through the Director of the Indian Health Service, to acquire private land to facilitate access to the Desert Sage Youth Wellness Center in Hemet, California, and for other purposes.

The IHS mission is to raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level. As an agency within HHS, the IHS provides Federal health services to approximately 2.6 million American Indians and Alaska Natives from 574 federally recognized tribes in 37 states, through a network of over 605 health care facilities including hospitals, clinics, health stations, and other facility types. The IHS also enters into agreements with 41 Urban Indian Organizations.

H.R. 4495 authorizes the IHS Director, through the HHS Secretary, to acquire land that contains a dirt road known as "Best Road" and other land or interests in lands in order to facilitate access to the IHS Desert Sage Youth Wellness Center (Desert Sage), in Hemet, California. Once the land is acquired, H.R. 4495 provides for the IHS Director to construct and maintain a paved road on that land.

The IHS Desert Sage is a co-ed residential treatment facility for youth (ages 12-17) with substance abuse and co-occurring disorders. Approximately 8,000 American Indian and Alaska Native youth per year in California require substance abuse treatment based on Census 2000 data. The facility concurrently provides care for maximum of 32 youth. Services offered include mental health, chemical dependency counseling, individual and group counseling, family therapy, traditional healing services, traditional arts and crafts, cultural activities, field/recreation trips, educational opportunities, academic and life-skills education, fitness program, and access to medical specialties and dental care. Desert Sage began operations in 2017 and received The Joint Commission accreditation on February 11, 2019. Desert Sage's activities are authorized under Section 704 of amended P.L. 94-437, Indian Health Care Improvement Act.

The Desert Sage facility is located on the "Taylor Ranch" property in Riverside County (County) near Hemet, California. The property was purchased in October 2012 for the facility. At that time, IHS had an agreement with the landowners to use the unpaved easement, Best Road, to cross two properties (Genus and Moon Valley Nurseries) to access the facility.

Best Road is an unimproved road, privately owned, and approximately 0.5 mile long located in the County that runs from Sage Road to the driveway entrance of the Desert Sage facility. The road conditions on Best Road deteriorate during storm events and become nearly impassible due to flooding in low-lying areas, poor surface drainage, and the lack of all-weather driving surface. Since October 2017, the IHS California Area Office continues to perform regularly scheduled maintenance every other month including grading and backfilling low areas with gravel. Emergency work is also done on an as-needed basis after major storm events. Currently, IHS does not have the authority to acquire and/or improve Best Road. H.R. 4495 would authorize the Director of IHS to acquire and improve Best Road to provide safe access to the Desert Sage facility for staff and emergency vehicles.

We remain firmly committed to improving quality, safety, and access to health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives. We appreciate all your efforts in helping us provide the best possible health care services to the people we serve. Thank you, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.