

PUEBLO OF ACOMA LETTERHEAD
TESTIMONY OF
GOVERNOR RANDALL VICENTE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS
IN SUPPORT OF S.4898
NOVEMBER 16, 2022

Guuwaadzi How ‘ba

[Mr. Chairman][Madam Vice Chair] and members of the Committee, my name is Randall Vicente, Governor of the Pueblo of Acoma. I am here today with other tribal leaders from New Mexico and together we stand united with the Pueblo of Laguna, the acequias, the community ditches in the Rio San Jose Basin, and the state of New Mexico in full support of S. 4898. With its passage, Congress will give my Pueblo an adequate water supply for the first time in one hundred years.

The legislation pending before you is extremely important to my People. We are in dire need of adequate water. The streams, aquifers, and springs that once fed the Rio San Jose – the life blood of our communities – and supported our agricultural lifestyle, has been severely impacted and, in some cases, devastated. We strongly believe that the actions and the failures of the federal government over the past century and a half have contributed greatly to the extreme water shortage that currently exists at Acoma.

My People settled at places along the Rio San Jose, long before the arrival of Europeans. We built our homes, raised our families, grew our crops, and lived off the river. Our spiritual beliefs, songs and cultural ways reflected the landscape. Know that we are an ancient people. We have rituals that are hundreds, if not a thousand years old, ceremonies that date back to our beginning - to that time when we believe we emerged from that center place, a place we call *Shipapu*. We came

into this world with a plan. We came with all that was necessary for us to survive. We emerged into this world accompanied by our Deities along with all living things and when we emerged, we began our journey in search of a place that would become a part of who we are, a place prepared, a place that would reflect our worldview, a place we call Haak'u.

Know that our spirituality is intimately tied to the land. We define ourselves according to geologic formations and visible sightings. Our faith is tied to the springs, valleys, mountains, and mesas that reflect the expanse of who we are as Acoma People and that includes the Rio San Jose.

At this point in our history, our river has been subjected to a legacy of contamination and dewatering upstream from our communities. Contamination is the result of decades of uranium mining and milling, an industry created and supported by the federal government. We are suffering from years of contaminants seeping into our groundwater. Our springs are running dry, and the aquifers need recharging. Climate change and severe drought conditions have reduced the snow melt and contributed to declines in water levels. Aquifers are no longer recharged. Access to a freshwater supply at this time is paramount. Only Congress can make that happen.

Know that the Rio San Jose once flowed rich with wildlife. Children in our villages played and swam in the deep flowing waters. Men in our villages used the water to farm and irrigate their fields - in fact, whole farming communities grew up along the Rio San Jose. Corn fields, alfalfa fields, and orchards were a common sight on both banks. Religious leaders attached ceremonial significance to our river as it wove its way across our traditional homelands.

Today, the water flow is dramatically reduced. The watershed has been severely impacted by those upstream. Acre feet that we are entitled to was unprotected by the federal government for over a century. Now, we look at our river and remember what was - not the shallow, barely flowing stream of today, depleted of water. Only Congress can right those wrongs.

Acoma has been engaged in a legal battle over water and water rights for more than 40 years. We finally reached a settlement with all the local parties including the state of New Mexico, other tribes, neighboring towns and the acequias. The legislation is the result of delicate negotiations. It will establish Acoma's legal right to water, along with a reliable supply, and protect water users in the region.

Acoma faces a future where water supplies are far from certain. However, this legislation will allow water planning over the long term to ensure a sustainable water future for my People.

We urge your support for S. 4898. Thank you, Mr. Chairman/ Madam Vice Chair.
Daa'wa'eh.