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**Written Testimony On: HR 1157  
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Good afternoon Chairman Young, Ranking Member Ruiz and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Vincent Armenta and I am the Tribal Chairman of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians.

On behalf of our Tribe, thank you for the opportunity to testify today about HR 1157, the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Mission Indians Land Transfer Act of 2015.

**I. Brief history of the Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians/California Tribes**

The Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians is located on the Santa Ynez Reservation in Santa Barbara County, California. Our Tribe was federally recognized in 1901 and remains the only federally-recognized Chumash Tribe in the nation.

The Chumash original territory lies along the California coast, between Malibu and Paso Robles, as well as on the Northern Channel Islands. The area was first settled about 13,000 years ago and at one time, the Chumash had a total population of approximately 18,000 people.

## **II. Need for Housing**

Our Tribe was eventually relegated to a 99-acre reservation. For many years, very few tribal members lived on our Reservation. Running water and electricity were not made available to our residents.

Our source of water had been declared unfit for human consumption. Tribal members living on the Reservation at that time had to walk to the creek to fill buckets of water for use in their homes. Toilets were open pits that sometimes overflowed into the creek, the very creek that supplied our members with drinking water.

While it took a few years and many fundraisers, our Reservation eventually secured running water and we finally had indoor plumbing in the late 1960s.

In the 1970s, our Tribe was able to secure funding and assistance from the Department of Housing and Urban Development to build the first modern homes on our Reservation. Those homes are now nearly 50 years old and are insufficient to meet the needs of our people. In many instances, multiple generations live under one roof. Still, only about 17% of our tribal members and lineal descendants live on our Reservation.

While the subdivision planned by HUD in the 1970's may have met basic health and safety standards, fire and rescue equipment commonly used today would be hard pressed to service many of the homes in our current development as the roads are too narrow and the population density is too great.

Unfortunately, building additional homes on our existing Reservation is not possible. The majority of our Reservation land is already developed and the remaining is in a creek bed or sloped areas that are impossible to develop.

Knowing the housing shortage would only worsen, our Tribe purchased 1,400 acres of ancestral land in 2010 – land known as “Camp 4.” One of our primary goals in purchasing the land is to build homes on it for our tribal members and their families.

Camp 4 sits just a few miles east of our Reservation. By official action, the Department of Interior has confirmed that Camp 4 is part of our ancestral lands.

### **III. Initial offer to County of SB, refusal to meet and rejection**

Shortly after purchasing the Camp 4 property, we submitted a Draft Cooperative Agreement to the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors, hoping to negotiate a payment in lieu of property taxes agreement. Even though the land was currently only generating \$81,000 in property taxes per year, we offered the county a million dollars annually, for ten years.

For more than two years, the Board ignored our offer.

On August 20, 2013, the Board voted 3-2 *not* to enter into a government-to-government dialogue, ending any hope we had of resolving this at the local level.

The official position of the Board to this day is that tribes are not governments and therefore the County need not negotiate with them. One supervisor even went so far as to call for the end of tribal sovereignty.

Unfortunately, the majority of the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors simply lack a basic understanding of tribes as governments – an elementary recognition required to work effectively with tribal nations.

### **IV. Meetings and agreements with Sheriff and Fire Department**

Notwithstanding the perpetual opposition from the County, our tribal government continues to build partnerships with those in the community who are willing to work with us.

For instance, we recently completed cooperative agreements with our local Sheriff and Fire Departments. Through these agreements, Chumash is now paying for law enforcement and fire safety services not only on our Reservation, but also mitigating off-reservation impacts and improving emergency services across the entire Santa Ynez Valley.

As members of the subcommittee will recall, just last month, the California State Association of Counties testified in support of a number of reforms for the land into trust process, including providing for a legal framework to encourage tribes to reach intergovernmental mitigation agreements. Mr. Chairman, it is not the tribes that need encouragement, but rather, it is the

counties. It is shameful that one of CSAC's leading members, Santa Barbara County, can't be troubled to take the advice of its own membership association.

These agreements demonstrate that we are willing to work with the County in a positive and constructive manner, if we are just given the opportunity to do so.

We have also built solid relationships in the community with various organizations. Through our Santa Ynez Band of Chumash Indians Foundation, our Tribe has played a significant role in the philanthropic arena, donating millions of dollars to a wide variety of non-profit organizations and schools. In addition to funding a myriad of community projects that benefit the entire community, our Tribe also provides volunteers for a number of non-profit organization projects through our volunteer organization, Team Chumash.

A few of our Foundation's recent donations include donating iPads to school children in an effort to expand technology access throughout the largest elementary school in the Lompoc school district, donating \$10,000 to the Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County to help the organization continue its efforts to reduce homelessness and donating annually to the Santa Ynez Valley People Helping People organization to help with emergency and short-term social services.

For the past decade, our Tribe has also hosted its annual Chumash Charity Golf Classic where the proceeds from the tournament go to well-deserving local charities. In 2014 the largest amount in the tournament's history was raised – \$150,000 – bringing the total amount raised through the tournament for local nonprofit organizations to \$1 million.

Through our Foundation, our Tribe has donated more than \$19 million to hundreds of groups, organizations and schools in the community and across the nation as part of our Tribe's long-standing tradition of giving.

## **V. Conclusion**

Sadly, relations between the Tribe and the Board of Supervisors and its anti-tribal allies remain toxic.

The Board and its allies blocked us from acquiring just 6.9 acres of trust land for nearly 14 years, as lawsuit after lawsuit was filed then dismissed. The BIA's decision to finally acquire the land last year came after a process that cost both the Tribe and our neighbors millions.

But now that the playbook has been written, we are witnessing the same game play out. The County's allies have once again filed frivolous lawsuits to stop the Tribe at every turn. And with housing pressures growing, we are left with passage of HR 1157 as the only viable solution.

Regardless of how we have been treated, the Santa Ynez Chumash still stand ready to work with the County to resolve concerns. For instance, we have heard fears about additional gaming—that's why the legislation takes gaming off the table. And if there are other reasonable requests, we remain open to finally opening a true government-to-government dialogue with the County of Santa Barbara.

As witnessed by our lengthy but successful efforts to bring the 6.9 acre parcel into trust via the administrative process, we will eventually prevail on this issue. The only two variables are timing and restrictions on land use. Your efforts and support of this legislation can ensure that the land is put in use in a timely manner with reasonable restrictions; or conversely, the land will eventually be brought into trust administratively with no restrictions on its use or additional financial compensation to the county.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I welcome any questions.

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