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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

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*Testimony of Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross supporting*  
***LD 1777 “An Act to Create Economic Opportunity for Wabanaki Nations via Internet Gaming”, LD 1944 “An Act Regarding Tribal Gaming”, & LD 1992 “An Act to Legalize Historic Horse Racing and Electronic Bingo to Allow Maine Gaming Licensees and Federally Recognized Indian Tribes to Compete with Other Gaming States”***  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary*

Good afternoon Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and esteemed members of the Veterans & Legal Affairs Committee. I am Representative Rachel Talbot Ross of Portland. I represent House District 118 which is the Portland peninsula and I have the distinct honor of serving as the Speaker of the House. I stand before you today to lend my strong support for LD 1777 “An Act to Create Economic Opportunity for Wabanaki Nations via Internet Gaming”, LD 1944 “An Act Regarding Tribal Gaming”, & LD 1992 “An Act to Legalize Historic Horse Racing and Electronic Bingo to Allow Maine Gaming Licensees and Federally Recognized Indian Tribes to Compete with Other Gaming States”.

During the 130th Legislature, LD 585 “An Act To Enhance Tribal-State Collaboration, To Revise the Tax Laws Regarding the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, the Passamaquoddy Tribe and the Penobscot Nation and To Authorize Casinos, Off-track Betting Facilities, Federally Recognized Indian Tribes and Certain Commercial Tracks To Conduct Sports Wagering” was heavily vetted, amended and ultimately signed into law was

This measure resulted in real resources being invested into the lives of Wabanaki Tribal citizens and helped to rebuild a respectful relationship between the state and the Tribal governments that exist within our borders. The bill improved communication between state agencies and Tribal governments, recognized Tribal citizens’ unique status in regarding the power to tax, and allowed for mobile sports wagering with Tribal governments having licenses to conduct online wagering.

**District 118:** Portland neighborhoods of Parkside, Bayside, East Bayside, Oakdale and the University of Southern Maine Campus

According to the Gambling Control Unit's website, since the November 3rd rollout of online wagering, over one million dollars in bets were placed each day in Maine. During the month of November, \$37,600,000 was wagered, with \$32,700,000 being paid out. All in all, Mainers proved to be pretty savvy betters.

The combination of winning payouts, federal taxes, and payments to the operation of the games, show that sports wagering has been a boon to the state and to the Tribes. In the month of November, over 300 thousand dollars were sent to the General Fund, and an estimated amount of three million dollars was disbursed to the Tribal governments.

In the month of December, online wagering continued at a similar rate. With the NFL playoffs and NCAA March Madness around the corner, participation is poised to increase.

This demonstrates that the demand that was projected has been met, and moreover, that three million dollars of new money is going towards Tribal governments to feed, house and keep their citizens healthy; citizens who have suffered from disparate health outcomes from limited opportunities and services for far too long.

This is just the start of a remarkable economic revival. LD 1777, LD 1944, and LD 1992 would continue to provide entertainment for Mainers who want to participate and a resource stream for Tribal governments to invest in their citizens. It is a win-win for the state and the Tribal nations.

As published in the December 2022 research report by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, "Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine", the Wabanaki Tribes have extremely disparate outcomes compared to not only Tribal nations across the United States but also their neighbors miles away. These three bills are looking to modify the application of the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act in Maine. This federal bill was identified in the Harvard report as the single largest barrier to improving the health and wealth of Tribal citizens.

Unemployment rates for the Wabanaki range from 5.7% to 7.5%, whereas unemployment for the state of Maine sits around 4%. Per capita income Per capita income ranges from \$11,431 to \$18,809 by the Penobscot Nation who benefit from nearby Old Town, Orono and Bangor.

Child poverty rates extend from a saddening 40.2% for the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Indian Township to a devastating 76.9% for the Mi'kmaq Nation situated within the city of Presque Isle. While the State of Maine struggles to grapple with the upsetting 15.1% of children who are born in poverty, the number of Wabanaki children suffering and living in poverty is exponentially higher. These disparities are unacceptable. This Committee can help change that by moving these bills forward.

Tribal governments must be able to create greater economic development on Tribal lands. Period. The bills in front of you today are solutions to begin fixing the problem. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today, I urge you to support this legislation.