

Shirley Hager
Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy
LD 1777

January 3, 2024

To: Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

From: Shirley Hager, 129 Chesterville Hill Road, Chesterville, ME 04938
Member, Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy (FCMPP) and Clerk of FCMPP's Committee on Tribal-State Relations

Re: Support for LD 1777, An Act to Create Economic Opportunity for Wabanaki Nations Through Internet Gaming; LD 1944; An Act Regarding Tribal Gaming; and, LD 1992, An Act to Legalize Historical Horse Racing and Electronic Beano to Allow Maine Gaming Licensees and Federally Recognized Indian Tribes to Compete with Other Gaming States

In testifying in support of LD 1777, LD 1944 and LD 1992, I speak on behalf of the Committee on Tribal-State Relations of the Friends (Quaker) Committee on Maine Public Policy, a statewide advocacy group. For over thirty years, one of our primary goals has been to support a right and just relationship between the State of Maine and our Wabanaki neighbors. We align ourselves with the advancement of Wabanaki interests to the betterment, we believe, of all of us who live in Maine. Our Committee urges you to vote unanimously "OUGHT TO PASS" on all three bills.

While Quakers have historically sought to be supporters and allies regarding Tribal concerns, in the past we have failed in at least one regard: we could not see our way clear to supporting gaming proposals put forth by the Tribes. Various referenda proposed by the Tribes to establish a casino were not supported by Quakers, even when we were specifically asked to do so. We could not get past our stance opposing gaming in general.

Time has passed and our understanding of the obstacles placed in the path of Wabanaki peoples by the State of Maine has grown. We have educated ourselves on the meaning and the essential importance of sovereignty for our Wabanaki neighbors. "Sovereignty" includes the ability to determine what is best for one's people given the opportunities available. In 2021, Quakers throughout Maine took a significant step; we united in support of the 22 recommendations of the 2020 Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act, with full knowledge that one of those recommendations, #17, was to "Amend the Maine Implementing Act to render the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act applicable in Maine". We documented that support through resolutions, or "minutes" as we refer to them.

Support for these three bills does not mean that all, or any, of the gaming activities described in them will be realized. Support for these three bills means that the Wabanaki will have choices when deciding what is best for the economic development of their communities given the opportunities available to them. This is nothing less than what any of us want for our communities; and, as we Quakers and many others in Maine have come to understand and appreciate, "when the Wabanaki thrive, we all thrive."

In the book, *The Gatherings: Reimagining Indigenous-Settler Relations*, the late Passamaquoddy Elder Wayne Newell says, "...look at what happened when we tried to get a casino. Look at the results of the state referendums. The results had nothing to do with people being in favor, or not in favor, of gambling, because when non-Natives want a casino it gets passed. When we present a referendum, it's voted down. We like to think that we've made some progress in people's attitudes, but that one saddens me an awful lot. Hopefully we can change it. Not that I believe that gambling is our economic savior; there are other things that we could do that might be better economic development, but that is one solution that's being considered at the moment."

The Tribal-State Relations Committee of the Friends Committee on Maine Public Policy strongly urges you to unanimously vote "OUGHT TO PASS" on the three bills being considered today: LD 1777, An Act to Create Economic Opportunity for Wabanaki Nations Through Internet Gaming; LD 1944; An Act Regarding Tribal Gaming; and, LD 1992, An Act to Legalize Historical Horse Racing and Electronic Beano to Allow Maine Gaming Licensees and Federally Recognized Indian Tribes to Compete with Other Gaming States. Thank you.