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March 31, 2025

Senator Hickman, Chair  
Representative Supica, Chair  
Members, Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333-0100

Re: LD 1164 – *An Act to Create Economic Opportunity for the Wabanaki Nations Through Internet Gaming*

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, thank you for the opportunity to provide information in opposition to LD 1164, *An Act to Create Economic Opportunity for the Wabanaki Nations Through Internet Gaming*.

This bill authorizes each federally recognized Indian nation, tribe or band in this State to operate Internet gaming<sup>1</sup> pursuant to a license from the Gambling Control Unit within Maine's Department of Public Safety (DPS). Under LD 1164, only a federally recognized Indian nation, tribe or band in this State will be eligible to obtain a license and operate Internet gaming. The licensing structure outline in this legislation follows the law governing sports wagering.

Internet gambling and gaming problems are known to impact social and health outcomes. Working with partners and contracted services, Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) supports problem gambling services that include supporting 211 to be a helpline for referrals to social workers and counselors with training in problem gambling treatment, and trainings for Maine's Problem Gambling Addiction Treatment Reimbursement Network providers who can be eligible to receive reimbursement when they provide counseling services to individuals and their family members who have no other means to pay for treatment. Self-exclusion (SE) is also available to support individuals. This is a self-directed intervention where an individual voluntarily completes a form which prevents that person from entering all casinos in Maine or placing bets with Maine sports wagering operators.

Efforts have focused on increasing program awareness following the legalization of sports wagering in 2023. Maine CDC - Tobacco and Substance Use Prevention and Control program has seen an increase in the number of individuals seeking help for a gambling problem. The

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<sup>1</sup> LD 1164 defines "Internet gaming" to mean a card game, dice game or other game of chance approved by the director, including but not limited to blackjack, poker, dice, craps, roulette or baccarat, offered through an approved mobile application or other digital platform that involves, at least in part, the use of the Internet. "Internet gaming" does not include a table game or slot machine under chapter 31; the sale of pari-mutuel pools authorized under chapter 11; the operation of fantasy contests as defined in section 1101, subsection 4; mobile sports wagering under chapter 35; or advance deposit wagering as defined in section 1001, subsection 1-A. Internet gaming is not a game of chance under Title 17, section 1831, subsection 5.

number of gambling addiction treatment network users has since tripled (from 3 people to 9), and is expected to continue to increase.

The rapid expansion of forms of gaming has been a challenge for regulators. There have longstanding concerns with how age and identity can truly be verified on internet platforms, where anonymity is known to be accessible to most; these concerns are similar to those raised about the ability to order alcohol online. Such gaps created by online accessibility are a risk to safeguards in place for self exclusion lists as well as those who are underaged. While the bill directs a portion of revenue collected which will be used to further prevention and treatment efforts, the number of individuals who may need support and resources will continue to increase along with the public health concerns associated with gambling and internet use.

In conclusion, Maine CDC opposes the further expansion to gambling access and urges the Committee to vote ought not to pass and allow time for more information to be known for assessing the impact of the recent expansion of internet-based sports wagering on Maine citizens. Internet gambling is a format that can be isolating, and isolation is a risk factor for poor health outcomes. Electronics including computers and cell phones are also isolating and addictive devices, and for that reason there are public health concerns about increasing access to gambling in such a manner that allows for play at all hours with opportunity for impulsive and problem gambling behavior.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions during your deliberation of this bill.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Anthony Va.", is positioned above the typed name.

Puthiery Va, DO

Director

Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention

Maine Department of Health and Human Services