

**Testimony of Chief Clarissa Sabattis, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, in Support of  
LD 1851 – An Act to Bring Parity Among the Wabanaki Nations  
Regarding the Generation of Revenues from Gaming  
May 7, 2025**

Good afternoon Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and Honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs. My name is Clarissa Sabattis, and I am the Chief of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. I am here today to urge this committee to vote “ought to pass” on LD 1851, *An Act to Bring Parity Among the Wabanaki Nations Regarding the Generation of Revenues from Gaming*.

As you know, the State of Maine has prohibited the four federally-recognized tribes in the state—the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, the Mi’kmaq Nation, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, and the Penobscot Nation—from operating casinos. This sets Maine apart from the rest of the United States, where tribes can participate in the gaming industry through the federal Indian Gaming Regulatory Act. Gaming revenues allow tribes from coast to coast to provide essential government services to all people (Indian and non-Indian) in their communities: law enforcement, housing, medical care, family services, roads and bridges, and mental health and addiction treatment, to name a few. The Wabanaki Nations have sought access to this same opportunity, but our efforts have been blocked by the State. Instead, Maine has chosen to grant a monopoly on casino gaming—slot machines and table games—to two casinos owned by out-of-state corporations. While the casinos support jobs for Mainers, their profits are sent to corporate shareholders outside of Maine.

The Hollywood Casino in Bangor has offered slot machines since 2005, and today has approximately 700 machines. It distributes a total of 39% of its net slot machine revenue. Recipients include the harness racing, commercial track, and off-track betting industries; agricultural fairs; Fund for a Healthy Maine; the University of Maine System, the Marine Maritime Academy, and the Maine Community College System; and the City of Bangor, among others. Hollywood Casino does not distribute any share of its slot machine revenue to the Wabanaki Nations. Oxford Casino has offered slot machines since 2012, and today has nearly 1,000 machines. It distributes a total of 46% of its net slot machine revenue to many of the same recipients, as well as the Department of Education (to support K—12 Education), the City of Oxford, and others. The tribal governments of the Passamaquoddy Tribe and Penobscot Nation receive 4% of the Oxford Casino’s net slot machine revenue (approximately \$3.5 million per year) and have received this revenue since the casino opened in 2012. The tribal governments of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi’kmaq Nation do not receive any share of this revenue.

LD 1851 would not reduce or affect in any way the monies currently distributed to various entities and programs from the Hollywood Casino or the Oxford Casino. Those amounts would not change. Our tribe, the Maliseet, especially understands that the revenues received by Passamaquoddy and Penobscot are critical to their ability to provide government services to their communities. All our tribes have significant unmet needs and underfunded programs. This is why we have supported the incremental expansions of responsible tribal gaming in Maine. LD 1851 would not reduce the monies received by the Passamaquoddy Tribe and the Penobscot Nation. We know how important every dollar is to the health and welfare of tribal citizens, and we would not want anything to be taken away from our sister tribes.

Instead, LD 1851 would ensure that all the tribes benefit from the operation of slot machines in Maine by increasing the total net slot machine revenue to be distributed by Hollywood Casino from 39% to 46%, and by providing for the distribution of the additional 7% to the tribal governments of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation. In actual dollars, the 7% amount distributed to the Maliseet and Mi'kmaq would be less than the 4% amount distributed by Oxford Casino to the other two tribes (see table below), but it would provide approximate parity.

These funds would have a tremendous impact in our community. The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians would use these funds to support underfunded programs such as housing, social services, ICWA, court, substance use treatment, recovery service, and for economic development and local job creation. It is much better for these revenues to stay in Maine and to support direct services, rural economic development, and jobs for Mainers, then it is for the revenues to leave the state for corporate coffers. The government services provided by our tribe with these funds would also further reduce the strain on state and local services and budgets. For example, every person who enters our court, or Maliseet Health and Wellness Court preserves resources in the state system for other Aroostook County residents. Please join me in supporting LD 1851. It is an important step in the right direction for our Tribe and for all Mainers. Thank you.

Net Slot Machine Revenue (NSMR), 2019-2024

Year	Oxford Casino NSMR Total (Actual)	<b>4% NSMR Oxford to Penobscot &amp; Passamaquoddy (Actual)</b>	Hollywood Casino NSMR Total (Actual)	<b>NSMR to Maliseet &amp; Mi'kmaq (Actual)</b>	Estimated 4% NSMR Hollywood <sup>1</sup>	<b>Estimated 7% NSMR Hollywood <sup>2</sup> (LD 1851)</b>
2024	\$85,154,409.66	<b>\$3,406,176.39</b>	\$52,165,931.50	<b>\$0</b>	\$1,836,451.63	<b>\$3,213,790.32</b>
2023	\$90,468,659.81	<b>\$3,618,746.39</b>	\$53,276,070.43	<b>\$0</b>	\$1,885,307.50	<b>\$3,299,288.11</b>
2022	\$89,903,283.84	<b>\$3,596,131.41</b>	\$49,941,241.78	<b>\$0</b>	\$1,776,904.11	<b>\$3,109,582.22</b>
2021	\$78,906,166.81	<b>\$3,156,246.65</b>	\$47,887,282.86	<b>\$0</b>	\$1,714,964.01	<b>\$3,001,186.95</b>
2020	\$38,123,550.27	<b>\$1,524,942.01</b>	\$24,521,992.95	<b>\$0</b>	\$880,024.96	<b>\$1,540,043.67</b>
2019	\$77,054,958.56	<b>\$3,082,198.46</b>	\$41,702,702.19	<b>\$0</b>	1,501,200.32	<b>\$2,627,100.55</b>

Source: <https://www.maine.gov/dps/gcu/casino-gaming/casino-revenue-distribution>

<sup>1</sup> The GCU 2024 revenue report indicates that the 4% share distributed to the Fund to Encourage Racing at Maine's Commercial Tracks was \$1,836,451.63. Figures in this column correspond to the 4% share actually distributed to the Fund to Encourage Racing at Maine's Commercial Tracks in each year.

<sup>2</sup> The GCU 2024 revenue report indicates that the 3% share distributed to the Sire Stakes Fund was \$1,377,338.69. Totalling this 3% distribution with the 4% distribution (see footnote 1) equals 7% or \$3,213,790.32. Figures in this column equal the total of the 3% share actually distributed to the Sire Stakes Fund and the 4% share actually distributed to the Fund to Encourage Racing at Maine's Commercial Tracks in each year.