

Testimony of Chief Pos Bassett
Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik (Pleasant Point)
Monday, March 31, 2025
Hearing before the Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

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

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica and members of the VLA committee.
My name is Chief Pos Bassett from the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify here today regarding LD1164.

I'm here today to speak in support of legalizing an activity that's already illegally occurring across the state of Maine.

Right now, if you wanted to, you could pull out your smartphone and go to the Google store or the Apple Store and download a number of apps that would probably give you free tokens or some something similar to allow you to start illegally gambling on your phone right now.

If you're somebody who's predisposed to addiction issues, you might not stop with free play.

You might continue gaming, and your activity would never be flagged as problem gambling.

You might never get the support you need because the operator is some shadowy offshore company, probably run by organized crime that could care less about Mainers.

Instead of the state of Maine generating tax revenue from this activity, these companies that are located offshore operate a lot of like the states casinos.

They just ship money from Maine to out of state coffers.

This isn't about hurting the casinos though—this is about regulating an activity that's already happening away from Bangor and Oxford casinos.

This is already happening on peoples' phones.

Why not use the existing activity to benefit state and tribal governments?

This year of all years, we need to generate more governmental revenues across the state of Maine.

We need new sources of revenue for our government to take care all the basic things that our communities always needed like healthcare, education, law enforcement, and social services.

But the costs of protecting our communities and handling all these things is always going up.

You know this just as well as we do.

But what you may not know is that our beautiful community in Down East Maine, called Sipayik has particularly severe funding challenges right now.

In our language Sipayik means the place at the edge of the water because it's located on the saltwater.

Because we're located on the saltwater we're able to enjoy some great things like beautiful sunrises over the water.

Like seeing whales out in the Bay, or having some of the best shellfish grounds in the world.

The downfalls are truly dangerous though.

The rough ocean winds and the saltwater wear down our homes and our infrastructure faster than in other places.

Our roofs, our siding on our homes and our government buildings, all erode faster because of the harsh ocean winds.

More dangerously though, our community is at severe risk from rising sea levels.

The latest FEMA flood map showed that our elderly center, our wastewater treatment plant, many homes and many sacred places at Sipayik are at severe risk of flooding because of rising seas.

The risk exists now and will only increase in the future.

We have no current solution for relocating our most vulnerable people, our elders, or moving all those other homes.

But we're working on plans to relocate our wastewater treatment plant.

The reality though is that if our wastewater treatment plan failed or was flooded, which could happen in the next big storm, it would cause an immediate public health disaster.

It would devastate the local fishing economy.

Now we know this and the Maine congressional delegation knows this.

We've worked carefully with our allies like Senator Collins to bring in much needed funds to cover the predesign and the engineering needed to prepare to relocate our wastewater treatment plant.

But the reality is that it will cost more than \$50 million just to move this one piece of infrastructure.

It will cost untold millions more to move homes and our elderly home and mealsite.

More than ever, we need new sources of revenue to help Sipayik get through the challenges ahead.

We must move our wastewater treatment plant.

We must raise money to do so.

Fortunately, we have this new, growing online sports gaming business.

Sports wagering has done well for the Passamaquoddy Tribe but we have not realized the economic benefits we really need.

The natural evolution of this business is into other forms of Internet gaming like roulette, blackjack and poker. That's what LD1164 would do.

It would help us grow our existing business.

It would grow our business in a way that would keep dollars in Maine circulating for the benefit of all Mainers.

LD 1164 will generate revenues that will help us save enough money to do things like move our wastewater treatment plant and survive what's to come from rising sea levels.

It will also deliver much needed money into the state budget and help address key critical issues like substance use and veteran homelessness.

Let us work with you to help grow Maine's economy together.

Please support and vote LD 1164 out of committee.

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