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Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher supporting
**LD 554, An Act to Create Gaming Equity and Fairness for the Native American Tribes in
Maine**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs

Good afternoon, Senator Luchini, Representative Caiazzo and members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee, I am Representative Laurie Osher. I represent District 123, which includes most of Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of **LD 554, An Act to Create Gaming Equity and Fairness for the Native American Tribes in Maine**.

I thank Representative Benjamin Collings for introducing this economic justice legislation.

As some of you already know, I studied soil science in college and learned to map soils there in the land of the Cayuga people. After college, I worked for several U.S. Federal Agencies, mapping soils in North and South America. A soil mapper walks the landscape to survey the terrain. We gather information about the place by talking with those who live and steward the land there.

In each place that I mapped, the indigenous peoples of the area had been displaced and relegated to small bits of land. I mapped for the Soil Conservation Service in North Carolina in the land of the Coahrie. In the Upper Amazon Basin of Peru, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development, I mapped soils in the land of the Ese'ejia. While working for the USDA Forest Service in Alaska, Colorado and California, I mapped soils in the lands of the Tlingit, the Arapaho and the Chimariko people.

Each of those Tribal Nations, except the Chimariko, who were killed by miners in 1820, continue to exist and interact with the governments in the states now occupying their lands. The representatives of those governments have the responsibility to shift the policies of their state from those that carry the legacy of the troubled past to laws that bring them to a more respectful present and future.

Maine just celebrated its 200-year anniversary of statehood. The Wabanaki Nations were here long before the state existed. As a citizen and a legislator, I acknowledge that Maine's treatment of the Wabanaki Nations has historically been paternalistic. Our laws, including the 1980 Land

Claims Settlement Act, represent the State's underlying racism. Many such laws were built on the racist assumption that the Wabanaki Nations have limited capacity to govern themselves.

We must do better. We must all recognize the inherent sovereignty of the Wabanaki Nations.

This bill seeks to fix just one of the ways that the paternalistic nature of Maine's laws have actually limited the capacity of the Wabanaki Nations to engage in economic activities.

The Indian Gaming Regulatory Act, a federal gaming law passed in 1988, gives autonomy over gaming facilities to Tribes in the United States. Here in Maine, the Wabanaki Nations are excluded from participating in gaming by the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980.

This bill, if passed, will enable the Wabanaki Nations to participate in gaming as an economic activity, just as other Tribes in the U.S. are legally allowed to do.

Please vote to support this bill. Thank you.