

## Testimony

### **LD 554 - An Act To Create Gaming Equity and Fairness for the Native American Tribes in Maine**

**To:** Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee

**From:** Jessie Perkins, Executive Director, Bethel Area Chamber of Commerce

**RE:** LD 554

**Date:** March 17, 2021

The Oxford Casino has had a profound impact on the economy of its local area, employing hundreds of people from a wide radius, while also contributing to state and local coffers and donating to countless nonprofits.

While I am not qualified to speak on the legal rights of Maine's tribes, any expansion to the number of casinos in Maine has the potential to negatively impact Oxford Casino and its surrounding communities. As you know, the Oxford Casino is among the facilities hardest-hit by the pandemic-related capacity restrictions, operating with a 200-person capacity in a facility designed to accommodate more than ten times that. That was only after being closed altogether for more than four months, and even now there is no guarantee as to when it can be at full capacity with all travel restrictions lifted. Despite this, the Oxford Casino has remained a committed partner of the Bethel Area Chamber and other local organizations, as well as doing the best it can to support its staff. But it is in the local communities' and state's best interest that it gets operating at peak capacity as soon as possible.

In tourism and every industry, we should all be focused on getting out of survival mode and moving towards thriving. Doing so requires that we shore up the assets we have first. Protecting the Oxford Casino will help do that for an area that really needs it.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.