

Sault Tribe Board of Directors dedicates \$5.5 million fund for team member wages

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. -- At its March 24 regular meeting, the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Board of Directors unanimously voted to authorize access to the tribe's \$5.5 million in Contract Support Cost Settlement Funds to cover team member wages during the COVID-19 State of Emergency.

The approved resolution ensures compensation for Sault Tribe and Kewadin Casino team members during the state of emergency. The funds will be made available to "back fill for cost of wages incurred during the casino shut down and governmental move to essential operations during the state of emergency," as outlined in the resolution.

The Contract Support Cost Settlement Fund is the tribe's share of a federal settlement with U.S. tribes. For decades, the federal government routinely shorted contracts it signed with tribal governments. After the US Supreme Court reaffirmed the shortfall, a settlement was negotiated between the tribes and the federal government.

According to Sault Tribe Economic Development Director Joel Schultz, in some circumstances, the Governor's Executive Order to "Stay Home, Stay Safe" applies and tribal enterprises will suspend operations. In others, he said, "We perform a valuable function to benefit tribal citizens and local customers like private rentals, our Midjim convenience stores for household provisions and tax exempt tribal benefits like gas."

The tribal Board of Directors and Chairperson shared a direct message to all tribal government, enterprise and Kewadin team members: "You are our everyday heroes. Often, we do not fully appreciate the scope of our tribal operations as a government. During a crisis, a government must operate. We depend on you to perform a sacred trust and duty to our people. For that, the Tribal Board and our Administrative Team are immensely grateful. We are taking every precaution to ensure your safety."

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