



Virg Bernero, Mayor



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CONTACT: Roger Martin, for the Sault Tribe
(517) 485-6600, rmartin@mwadvocacy.com

Sault Tribe Asks Federal Court to Dismiss State's Lawsuit Seeking to Block Lansing Casino

LANSING, Mich. —The Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians late Monday asked a federal judge to dismiss the State of Michigan's lawsuit seeking to block the Tribe from starting the process to take land into trust under the Michigan Indian Land Claims Settlement Act for a Lansing casino.

State Attorney General Bill Schuette on Sept. 7 filed a lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Michigan in an apparent effort to stop the Lansing casino project that would create 2,200 good jobs and generate enough revenue to pay four years of college for all Lansing public school students.

The Tribe asked U.S. District Court Judge Robert J. Jonker to dismiss the lawsuit, arguing it is totally without merit.

"The essence of our motion is this: because the State's lawsuit is utterly without merit, it should be dismissed and dismissed quickly," said Sault Tribe Chairperson Aaron Payment.

Despite the litigation, the City of Lansing and the Tribe continue to move full speed ahead on all plans for the casino.

On Nov. 1, the city and Tribe completed a critical step in their effort to win federal approval of the \$245 million casino, which will be built adjacent to the Lansing Center in the heart of the city's entertainment district. On that day, the Tribe completed the agreement to purchase the city-owned land adjacent to the Lansing Center where the casino will be built.

Pending the outcome of the litigation, the Tribe will soon apply to the federal government to take the land into trust, clearing the way for the construction of the 125,000-square-foot casino. The casino is expected to create an estimated 1,500 permanent jobs at the property and more than 700 construction jobs.

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The Sault Tribe has successfully operated Indian casinos in the state since 1984 and currently owns five Kewadin Casino properties in the Upper Peninsula. With more than 40,000 members, the Sault Tribe is the largest federally-recognized tribe east of the Mississippi and one of the largest job providers in Northern Michigan with 1,900 employees at its casinos, other businesses, and tribal government agencies.

The Tribe will use casino revenues to improve programs and services to members, including health care, education, housing, elder care, social services, and more. The City of Lansing will use its annual revenue payments from the facility to create the Lansing Promise, a program to fund four-year college scholarships for Lansing School District graduates. The land transaction completed on Nov. 1 includes a parcel adjacent to the Lansing Center at Michigan Avenue and Larch, which the Tribe acquired for a total cost of \$280,000, plus \$9,000 in closing costs. The purchase price reflects the full fair market value of the land. The agreement between the city and Tribe is for the Tribe to close on the other two other parcels of land over time at a price already agreed to by all parties, assuming all approvals for the project are secured.

Plans for the casino include up to 3,000 slot machines and 48 table games, and assorted bars and restaurants in an urban modern-themed property. The project has been approved by the Lansing City Council, the Sault Tribe Board of Directors, and the Sault Tribe membership in a tribal referendum held earlier this year.

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