

**Media Release**

**For Immediate Release**

**July 6, 2021**

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## **Sault Tribe allocates over \$125 million to date to benefit tribal members everywhere, employment team member benefit, pandemic revenue replacement and an historical commitment to long term recovery**

SAULT TRIBE RESERVATION, Mich. – To date, the Sault Tribe Board of Directors appropriated \$91 million of the tribe's American Rescue Act (ARA) funding for tribal member relief at \$2,000 for each and every tribal member everywhere for all ages.

With a tribal population of over 45,000, the distribution of checks is a monumental job, which requires address updates, enrollment of minor children and the completion of a form, a simple statement of need rather than an income-based application. The tribal administration is working diligently to update addresses and prepare a direct mailing that should be mailed in the next several weeks.

A tribal member address update link is being prepared for posting on the tribal website. Please see the Sault Tribe website as best source of information at: [www.saulttribe.com](http://www.saulttribe.com). Tribal members will be able to fill out this electronically on the website. Members are also welcome to update their address by calling Tribal Enrollment toll-free at (800) 251-6597.

Members are advised to be patient. Checks will be mailed out in rolling batches as forms are returned such that the bulk of checks should arrive by mid to late August.

A \$10 million appropriation made at the July 6, 2021, board meeting to address long standing issues of bringing tribal team members to market value. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the tribal board authorized an updated market study to determine an appropriate pay scale for all team members. With tribal board approval, the effective date of implementation backdated to July 6, 2021. Given the large volume of work remaining, adjustments to bring team members to market value is estimated to be just after Labor Day.

Executive Director Christine McPherson said, "We have been working diligently on preparing a budget recommendation for the tribal board to bring all team members to market value. The governmental, housing, casino and enterprise team members are the engine that runs the tribe, so we are excited to finally reward team members by bringing them to market value. The board's \$10 million commitment is significant and appreciated."

Also approved is a historical \$25 million commitment to address the drug and substance abuse challenge in our larger tribal community, including the opiate epidemic that the Centers for Disease Control report as some of the highest rates of affliction among American Indians and Alaska Natives due to historical and inter-generational trauma. The Sault Tribe was one of the first tribes in the country to approve a Tribal Action Plan as a first step. During our extensive research, the tribe identified the need for detox, in-patient recovery treatment and establishment of a new long-term Recovery Campus. A few years ago, the tribe entered a unique partnership with Betty Ford and Hazelden to develop a unique

treatment based on our Anishinaabe Biimaadzwini and dedicated and blessed land 4 miles west of the I-75 interchange on M-28, near Dafer, Mich.

The pandemic made the challenges of the opiate and other substance abuse epidemic even more acute. Chairperson Payment said, "Each of us has been impacted by both the pandemic and the opiate and substance abuse health crisis. Our care and concern for our own people is demonstrated and I am personally grateful for this appropriation by the board."

Finally, over the course of the pandemic, the tribe's main revenue source for operations was interrupted by up to a 70 percent loss. In order to support the safety of the public and our team members, casino operations were shuttered for two fiscal quarters. Casino payroll was \$23 million in 2021, which expends the vast majority of our gross revenues. One hundred percent of operating income supports governmental operations. The estimated amount left to recover after various revenues replacement loans were applied in 2020 is \$38 million and another \$20 million estimated through 2021. In order to preserve the cash flow from the casino to tribal programs and to fully replenish lost revenues, the board earmarked \$50 million for revenue replacement. These funds will in turn, stabilize payroll and tribal programs, services and operations.

The net effect is that over \$35 million remains to be allocated, along with an additional \$50 million for the second distribution of the American Rescue Act funds, which the tribe is projected to receive by July 15. The tribal board is meeting weekly to hear tribal priorities, review the tribe's strategic plan, and trying to merge needs and wants for the remaining \$80 to \$90 million. Additionally, the board has identified the need to hold large in-person and virtual tribal member input sessions to help identify needs. The chairperson and the tribal board office are working on scheduling sessions beginning as soon as mid-July.

For questions, please contact Chairperson Payment at (906) 635-6050. For regular updates, please visit the tribe's website at [www.saulttribe.com](http://www.saulttribe.com).

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