

Tribe to form COVID-19 Task Force

SAULT STE. MARIE, Mich. — Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians Chairperson Aaron Payment and Board of Directors have endorsed the establishment of a COVID-19 Task Force as presented by the tribe's executive team. The task force will ensure the Sault Tribe's Coronavirus Relief Fund monies are spent in compliance with the CARES Act and the tribe's priorities dealing with the ongoing pandemic.

Sault Tribe received \$37.2 million from the Coronavirus Relief Fund. According to the CARES Act language, tribes may use the money for "necessary" expenses caused by the public health emergency from March 1 to Dec. 30, 2020. The Sault Tribe established a unified approach that prioritized paying team members and recouping any losses that have occurred. Categories of allowable expenditures are:

- Direct Medical Expenses;
- Public Health Expenses;
- Payroll expenses for public safety, public health, health care, human services, and similar employees whose services are substantial dedicated to mitigating or responding to the COVID-19 public health emergency;
 - Expenses of actions to facilitate compliance with COVID-19 related public health measures;
 - Expenses associated with the provision of economic support in connection with the COVID-19 public health emergency;
 - Emergency family assistance; and
 - Any other COVID-19-related expenses reasonably necessary to the function of government that satisfy the Fund's eligibility criteria.

The federal relief funds are restricted to the above purposes and may be audited under federal regulation. Chairperson Payment said, "Every penny will be budgeted and accounted for in compliance with federal regulations." Tribal administration has also been successful in securing additional targeted relief funds that are restricted to addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 funding will substantially help the tribe recover from the enormous losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, but it won't be like pressing a reset button. The tribe is working to build new models for its businesses and health care, as well as membership services and governmental operations, to ensure resilience in the face of future COVID-19 outbreaks and other emergencies. The COVID-10 Task Force will dedicate its time and energy to implementing these plans, establishing COVID-19 programs, ensuring compliance with the CARES Act and reporting to the membership.

Chairperson Payment and Board of Directors said, "We are working in a unified way to protect our tribal members; Kewadin, enterprise and government team members; and patrons during this crisis. We are especially grateful for our executive administrative team, front line and essential workers and all team members during these trying times. We ask for everyone's patience as our COVID-19 Task Force prepares its recommendations."

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