



FEDERATED INDIANS OF
GRATON
R A N C H E R I A

February 12, 2025

The Honorable Blanca E. Rubio
Assembly Committee on Governmental Organization
Legislative Office Building
1020 N Street, Room 360A
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: AB 221 (Ramos) Tribal Nations Grant Fund - SUPPORT

Dear Assembly Member Rubio,

On behalf of the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria (Tribe), I write in strong support of the passage of AB 221. This bill will provide additional much-needed funding to tribes located in rural areas of California by redirecting some funds from the Tribal Nation Grant Fund (TNGF) to them as direct annual grants, so that the benefits of tribal gaming may be more equitably shared among all California tribes.

As you know, California was the first state to create a state-wide mechanism for sharing gaming revenue with tribes which either do not operate gaming facilities (non-gaming tribes) or which operate 300 or fewer gaming devices (limited gaming tribes), via the revenue sharing trust fund (RSTF). Tribes with gaming facilities operating more than 300 gaming devices contribute a portion of their gaming revenues into the RSTF, and those funds are then distributed to non-gaming and limited gaming tribes as an annual grant of \$1.2 million per tribe. Often, the tribes eligible for annual RSTF payments are located in isolated or rural areas, and so simply do not have access to the type of markets that would support large gaming operations. At the same time, these tribes have the responsibility to provide for their citizens' health care, education, public safety, housing and all the other critical governmental needs. The RSTF grants provide a crucial safety net for these tribes and helps ensure the benefits of tribal gaming are felt across California.

However, since the RSTF was established in 2000, the annual grant amount has not changed. Of course, costs certainly have not remained stagnant for the past twenty-five years. I have continuously advocated for increasing the RSTF payments to the non-gaming and limited

gaming tribes, so that we can fulfill the promise of Indian gaming to increase tribal self-determination and self-reliance across California.

To that end, our Tribe's initial gaming compact with the state of California in 2012 was the first to establish the TNGF as a mechanism to increase shared gaming revenues for all California tribes. The TNGF established an additional fund from which non-gaming and limited gaming tribes could apply for grants to help defray the cost of larger capital projects that they may not otherwise be able to fund. We are proud of this innovation to provide more resources to more tribes throughout California.

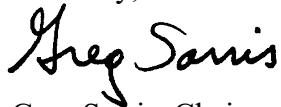
But we did not stop there: when we amended our tribal-state gaming compact with the State of California in 2023, the Tribe established (again, as the first California tribal-state gaming compact to do so) a Supplemental RSTF, which directs even more funding to the non-gaming and limited gaming tribes, upon the attainment by our gaming operation of certain revenue thresholds. And we continue to advocate for yet greater increases in the RSTF payments so that non-gaming and limited gaming tribes do not fall further behind as costs keep rising.

In that spirit, I am pleased that AB 221 would direct 85% of the funds in the TNGF each year, or \$600,000 per RSTF-eligible tribe, whichever is larger, to all non-gaming and limited gaming tribes in equal shares. To help fund large capital projects, the remaining 15% would be retained as a grant fund so that tribes can apply for funding for needed projects in their communities. The passage of AB 221 would mark the first increase in payments to RSTF-eligible tribes for twenty-five years, and that fact alone should be sufficient to pass the bill.

The amount of increase for each RSTF-eligible tribe is a substantial step in the right direction, but we have to recognize that it remains a relatively small step. For example, a recent study pointed out that the \$1.2 million RSTF annual payments should be about \$1.9 million, just to keep pace with inflation. We clearly have to do much more to help support non-gaming and limited gaming tribes, and I am happy to finally see a funding increase.

On behalf of our Tribal Council and our Citizens, I strongly support the passage of AB 221, which will help ensure the benefits of tribal gaming are felt by tribes, and the communities of which they are a part, across California.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Greg Sarris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Sarris, Chairman

cc: Hon. James C. Ramos