

Wichita and Affiliated Tribes

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PRESS RELEASE

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May 15, 2020

Anadarko, OK – The Wichita and Affiliated Tribes to Provide Tax-Free Emergency Relief to Tribal Members in Response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Wichita and Affiliated Tribes intends to provide some much needed emergency relief to tribal members in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Tribe's Executive Committee adopted a series of laws establishing new oversight infrastructure for its various benefits programs and approving emergency relief payments for tribal members and their families devastated by the COVID-19 crisis. The laws were adopted in accordance with the federal Tribal General Welfare Exclusion Act to ensure these and other benefits will be tax-free to members.

"Overall, this new tribal law will encourage the Tribe's self-reliance and reduce its dependence on the federal government by allowing the Tribe more leeway in how it administers programs at an effective, local level," said Terri Parton, President of the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes.

Parton said that 23 specific types of programs within five broad categories—housing programs, educational programs, elder and disabled programs, other qualifying programs, as well as cultural and religious programs—will be presumed to be "for promotion of the general welfare" of the Tribe.

“The Wichita and Affiliated Tribes Sugar Creek Casino, Tribal Government and Child Care Centers have been temporary closed since March 17, 2020. Other tribal entities have also been closed since that time. That will be over 2 months by time we begin opening to the public again on June 1, 2020. The closures have made getting much needed services to tribal members hard amid the COVID-19 outbreak. The intent for the emergency relief will be to help tribal members 18 and older with food, rent, utilities, medical expenses, testing and other COVID-19 related

emergency expenses. We have many tribal members that have had unforeseen financial needs and risks that have been created by the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. Furloughs across the United States, inability to receive expected unemployment payments due to furloughs, closures of businesses, loss of jobs, school closures, daycare closures in some instances requiring tribal members to pay out of pocket for child care, medical conditions, requirements to purchase PPE due to city ordinances and for safety precautions, COVID-19 testing, etc. have all led to additional expenses for Wichita families across the United States. Due to social distancing, telework, Shelter-In-Place orders, Stay-At-Home orders and the possibility of future closures should another outbreak occur as things across the State begin to open up, the emergency relief assistance to tribal members became the most practical solution to helping our people amid the COVID-19 crisis now and over the next few months. Our people will be able to use the COVID-19 emergency funds to meet their needs to address how COVID-19 has specifically affected and will affect each of those members eligible for the tax-free emergency relief," Parton said.

The funds for tribal member COVID-19 emergency relief payments will come from funding the Tribe received from the \$8 billion tribal allocation under the Coronavirus, Aid, Relief, and Economic Security ("CARES") Act.

Parton said that while the Tribe passed a COVID-19 relief program to provide \$1,000 in emergency relief for tribal members, a system to administer this specific relief payment program will need to be established. Parton estimated program details would be finalized within the next few weeks.

"We have been actively engaged in gathering emergency resources to provide PPE, food, testing and so much more for tribal members and our community. Passing the new general welfare ordinance and enacting the emergency relief funding is just one more way we can ensure tribal members get some much needed relief in these uncertain times in a way that maximizes that relief—tax free," Parton said.

The Wichita and Affiliated Tribes consists of approximately 3,400 citizens and is aboriginal to Oklahoma. Its reservation is located in western Oklahoma, north of Anadarko.