



**Pokégnek Bodéwadmik**  
POKAGON BAND OF POTAWATOMI



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TRIBAL POLICE



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **POKAGON BAND OF POTAWATOMI POKAGON BAND TRIBAL POLICE AND FOUR WINDS CASINOS SUPPORT HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS MONTH**

NEW BUFFALO, Mich. and SOUTH BEND, Ind. – January 17, 2025 – The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians of Michigan and Indiana, its Tribal Police, and its Four Winds® Casinos are lending their support to help raise awareness for National Human Trafficking Prevention Month, which is recognized every January.

According to the Department of Homeland security, [human trafficking](#) refers to a crime whereby traffickers exploit and profit at the expense of adults or children by compelling them to perform labor or engage in sexual acts. Traffickers might use violence, manipulation, false promises of well-paying jobs, or romantic relationships to lure victims into trafficking situations. Fear of their traffickers, and/or fear of law enforcement, along with language barriers, are often cited as reasons that keep victims from seeking help, making human trafficking a hidden crime. It is important to note that a victim need not be physically transported from one location to another for the crime to fall within this definition.

Providing some perspective on the magnitude of the problem, in 2023 the National Human Trafficking Hotline reported 254 cases in [Michigan](#) which included 506 victims. In [Indiana](#) there were 110 cases including 185 victims for the same period. While human trafficking can occur to individuals of any age, gender, nationality, sexual orientation, and socio-economic class, [Native American](#) communities are disproportionately impacted by this crime.

“Regardless of the numbers or the source of the statistics, one victim of human trafficking is too many,” said Matthew Wesaw, Chairman of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians. “The Pokagon Band is committed, not just every January, but year-round to using all of the tools and training available to make human trafficking in the communities in which we reside, a thing of the past. We encourage all community leaders to get involved and work together to educate the public about how to identify and prevent this crime.”

Mary Smith, Chief Operating Officer of Four Winds Casinos added, “There are some important ways everyone can get involved to raise awareness and fight human trafficking in our communities, including talking to friends, family, and co-workers about the issue; hosting and participating in training sessions to learn how to recognize the signs; promoting important resources for victims; and knowing how to report a crime.”

Mario RedLegs, Chief of the Pokagon Band Tribal Police said, “Traffickers often exploit individuals who are experiencing vulnerabilities including financial hardship, homelessness, and language or cultural barriers. If you or someone you know is subject to human trafficking, please contact local law enforcement directly or call the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 1-888-373-7888. You can also text the National Human Trafficking Hotline at 233733. By being able to identify the [signs](#) of individuals experiencing trafficking and reporting tips, you are doing your part to help law enforcement recover victims.”

The Pokagon Band’s Victims Services and Tribal Police recently hosted a human trafficking prevention training for local law enforcement partners and Pokagon Tribal Government team members from December 3 – 5, 2024. 32 police officers completed the training.

**About The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians of Michigan and Indiana**

The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi’s sovereignty was reaffirmed under legislation signed into law by President Clinton in September of 1994. The Pokagon Band is dedicated to providing community development initiatives such as housing, education, family services, medical care, and cultural preservation for its more than 6,000 citizens. The Pokagon Band’s ten-county service area includes four counties in Southwestern Michigan and six in Northern Indiana. Its main administrative offices are located in Dowagiac, Mich., with a satellite office in South Bend, Ind. In 2007, it opened Four Winds Casino Resort in New Buffalo, Mich., followed by Four Winds Hartford in 2011, Four Winds Dowagiac in 2013 and Four Winds South Bend in January 2018. The Pokagon Band operates a variety of non-gaming businesses through its investment enterprises, Mno-Bmadsen and the Pokagon Development Authority. More information is available at [www.pokagonband-nsn.gov](http://www.pokagonband-nsn.gov), [www.fourwindscasino.com](http://www.fourwindscasino.com) and [www.mno-bmadsen.com](http://www.mno-bmadsen.com).

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