



## *Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Indians*

*Executive Branch of Tribal Government*

*Office of the Chief Executive*

*Via E-mail*

July 11, 2025

Sheldon Boyd, Speaker of the Assembly  
Carolyn Beaulieu, District I Representative  
Wendy Merrill, District II Representative  
Harry Davis, District III Representative

Re: Nomination Letter for Michele Palomaki to Serve as Commissioner of Administration

Aaniin. It is with great pleasure that I nominate Michele Palomaki to serve a four-year term as Commissioner of Administration for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. As someone who has served the Band in various leadership roles for many years, I have the utmost confidence in Michele to lead, reconfigure, and reimagine the Department of Administration for future generations of Band members. A former Assistant Commissioner of Administration from 2011-2017, Michele possesses both the administrative know-how and soft skills necessary to make the department a success. Michele is also an adherent to values-driven leadership, making sure that each of her initiatives reflects accountability, transparency, and a steadfast commitment to doing what's right. For each of these reasons, Michele stands out as an ideal candidate for *Commissioner of Administration*.

Michele got her start in Band government in 2001 as a Grants Reporting Specialist with the Office of Management & Budget. While serving in this position for approximately 18 months, Michele began developing a strong foundation in grant management, financial reporting, and government program accountability. In 2003, Michele was promoted to Finance Officer, where she provided oversight of day-to-day operations (including payrolls, accounts payable, and accounts receivable) and worked directly with external auditors to ensure regulatory compliance. Then, from 2005 to 2011, Michele served as the Director of Circle of Health, a multi-million-dollar health coverage initiative providing affordable healthcare access to Band members. Michele's success as a Director is what ultimately thrust her into the Assistant Commissioner of Administration role, a position for which she was nominated by two consecutive Chief Executives.

While serving as Assistant Commissioner of Administration, Michele provided executive leadership for various governmental departments, including Human Resources, Information Systems, Grants, Self-Governance, Child Support Enforcement, Government Affairs, and what was then called the Department of Labor (now Aanjibimaadizing). Fostering close connections within the department and with the Legislative Branch, Michele developed a reputation for strategic thinking, strong management, effective communication, and a situational leadership approach that allowed her to adapt to the challenges posed by unique and changing circumstances. Indeed, Michele's approach proved effective in both fiscal management and navigating the Band's complex biennial budgeting process.

Since serving as Assistant Commissioner of Administration, Michele has spent the past eight years serving as the Chief Executive Officer of Wewinabi, Inc., a subsidiary to Mille Lacs Corporate

**Letter from Chief Executive Virgil Wind to the Band Assembly**  
**Re: Nomination Letter for Michele Palomaki to Serve as Commissioner of Administration**  
**July 11, 2025**  
**Page 2 of 3**

Ventures. In this role, Michele manages a diverse portfolio of eight non-gaming businesses located on or near the Mille Lacs Reservation. These businesses include the Grand Market, Grand Makwa, Grindstone Laundry, the district convenience stores, and Mille Lacs Wastewater. As CEO, Michele has committed herself to expanding Band member employment figures and creating meaningful development opportunities for Band members. In fact, when Michele accepted the newly created CEO position, the rate of Band member employment for all of Mille Lacs Corporate Ventures was less than 20 percent. Michele persevered against these headwinds and managed to elevate Wewinabi's rate to as high as 47 percent (a rate which decreased to approximately 33-35 percent after Grindstone Laundry rejoined the portfolio).

In addition to all of the leadership positions Michele has held for the Band, she has also served as a Gaming Regulatory Commissioner (2004); served as a member of Women Empowering Women in Indian Nations (2011-2022); and served as a Mille Lacs Band Delegate for Constitutional Reform under the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (2018 – Present). Michele is also a lifelong learner who has consistently strived to improve herself, even while serving in high-intensity roles. For example, in recent years Michele not only earned her Bachelor's Degree in Business Management (College of St. Scholastica – 2016), but also her Master of Legal Studies in Indigenous Peoples Law (University of Oklahoma College of Law – 2020).

In 2022, Michele also achieved a 6-month certificate as a Tribal Court Legal Advocate from the National Tribal Trial College at the University of Wisconsin Law School. Next, Michele aspires to sit for the Law School Admissions Test, setting a tremendous example for any Band member interested in attending law school.

At her core, Michele sees herself as a bridge-builder who creates relationships that cut across the lines of conflict. Michele is also an action-oriented leader who is committed to driving meaningful progress while standing firm in integrity. In her free time, Michele enjoys working on projects at home and adding to her Audible library. I offer my full support for Michele's nomination and look forward to her confirmation hearing and subsequent vote for ratification.

*NOTE: Although Michele is my first-cousin, she is not considered "immediate family" under 6 MLBS § 1153(b). Therefore, I do not believe my nomination of her as Commissioner of Administration poses a conflict of interest under 6 MLBS § 1156. Also, I am nominating Michele based on her qualifications and because I believe it is in the best interests of the Band to do so.*

Miigwech,



Virgil Wind  
Chief Executive

**Letter from Chief Executive Virgil Wind to the Band Assembly**  
**Re: Nomination Letter for Michele Palomaki to Serve as Commissioner of Administration**  
**July 11, 2025**  
**Page 3 of 3**

CC:

Caleb Dogeagle, Solicitor General  
Jared Miller, Legislative Counsel  
Michele Palomaki, Nominee  
Danielle Smith, Parliamentarian / Clerk of the Assembly

Enclosure:

Michele Palomaki's Resume

# Michele Palomaki

---

## Objective

- Enrolled member of the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, seeking to apply my skills, experience, and commitment to successfully take on new challenges. Passionate about enhancing my education and dedicated to serving my community and other Native nations through meaningful, impactful work.

## Education

**MLS INDIGENOUS PEOPLES LAW | DECEMBER 2020 | COLLEGE OF LAW OKLAHOMA UNIVERSITY**

**NATIONAL TRIBAL TRIAL COLLEGE | JULY 2022 | TRIBAL COURT LEGAL ADVOCATE (6 MONTH CERT)**

**BA MANAGEMENT | MAY 2016 | COLLEGE OF ST SCHOLASTICA**

**ASSOCIATE OF ARTS | MAY 2011 | CENTRAL LAKES COLLEGE**

**ASSOCIATE OF SCIENCE-MEDICAL OPTION | MAY 1998 | NORTHERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**

## Skills & Abilities

### MANAGEMENT

- Strong Management skills – problem-solving, analytics, decision-making, planning, execution, and time management.

### COMMUNICATION

- Ability to interact and effectively communicate with people from diverse backgrounds, highlighting teamwork and problem-solving.

### LEADERSHIP

- Situational Leadership Approach - I have the flexibility, personality, and skills to apply various kinds of leadership depending on the situation demands, and I will quickly adapt my style to meet the needs of each specific situation.

## Experience

**CEO OF WEWINABI, INC | MILLE LACS BAND CORPORATE VENTURES ENTITY | JULY 2017-PRESENT**

- Results-driven professional with over 7 years of experience managing a diverse portfolio of eight non-gaming businesses located near or on the Mille Lacs Reservation. Well-versed in forecast management, strategic planning, and cultivating sustainable business visions. Committed to advancing Mille Lacs employment initiatives and creating meaningful development opportunities for Band members.

**ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER OF ADMINISTRATION | MILLE LACS BAND OF OJIBWE | AUGUST 2011-JUNE 2017**

*Served 2.5-year term followed by a 4-year term.*

- Provided executive leadership for the Mille Lacs Band Administrative Division, overseeing governmental departments including Human Resources, Information Systems, expanding Grants, Self-Governance, Department of Labor, Health programs (combining I.H.S. and Circle of Health programs), Child Support Enforcement and Government Affairs. Contributed to biennium budgeting, fiscal management, and high-level strategic decision-making initiatives.

**CIRCLE OF HEALTH DIRECTOR | MILLE LACS BAND OF OJIBWE | JULY 2005-AUGUST 2011**

- Serves as Director of the Mille Lacs Band's Circle of Health Program, a multi-million-dollar health coverage initiative providing affordable healthcare access for enrolled tribal members. At the request of elected leadership, led the successful transition of the program from HHS to Administrative Division. Responsible for fiscal oversight, policy and procedure updates, and long-term sustainability planning to ensure the program's viability for future generations. Collaborated with the Circle of Health Board, provided regular program updates and financial reports to Band leadership, and represented the Band in external healthcare forums, including Health Care Exchange meetings to prepare for Affordable Care Act Implementation. Collaboratively implementing the endowment fund.

**FINANCE OFFICER | MILLE LACS BAND OF OJIBWE-OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET | MAY 2003-JULY 2005**

- Promoted to Finance Officer within 18 months of joining the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe Office of Management and Budget. Provided oversight of day-to-day operations, including payroll, accounts payable, and accounts receivable. Worked directly with external auditors to ensure compliance with established financial procedures and regulatory standards. This role strengthened my fiscal management expertise and provided valuable experience in overseeing multiple accounts and operational processes within a government finance environment.

**GRANTS REPORTING SPECIALIST | MILLE LACS BAND OF OJIBWE-OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET | OCTOBER 2001-MAY 2003**

- Gained valuable experience in the administration, reporting and financial auditing of state, federal, and private grant programs. Managed grant reporting processes. Collaborated with the Financial Analyst to produce accurate monthly financial expense reports for the Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe. This role provided a strong foundation in grant management, financial reporting, and government program accountability.

Further work experience from Michigan 1989-2001

**Professional Organizations/Membership**

Honor Society	2020 – Present
MLB Delegate for Constitutional Reform, District IIA & D1	Winter 2018-Present
WEWIN (Women Empowering Women in Indian Nations)	2011- 2022
Blandin Reservation Community Leadership Program	2013
Administration Policy Board – Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	2011 – 2017
Circle of Health Board	2005 – 2011
Gaming Regulatory Commissioner – Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe	2004

**REFERENCES UPON REQUEST**