1 BEFORE THE 2 CALIFORNIA GAMBLING CONTROL COMMISSION 3 In the Matter of the Application for Approval CGCC Case No. CGCC-2022-0811-12H 4 of Tribal Key Employee Finding of Suitability BGC Case No. BGC-HQ2022-00021SL Regarding: 5 ARRON NORTON 6 **DECISION AND ORDER** 7 Hearing Date: June 2, 2023 8 Respondent. Time: 10:00 a.m. 9 10 This matter was heard by the California Gambling Control Commission (Commission) 11 pursuant to Business and Professions Code sections 19870 and 19871, and Title 4, California 12 Code of Regulations (CCR) section 12060, via Zoom video conference, on June 2, 2023. 13 Respondent Arron Norton (Norton) appeared on his own behalf during the evidentiary 14 hearing. 15 Jeremy Stevens, Deputy Attorney General, State of California (DAG Stevens), 16 represented complainant Yolanda Morrow, Director of the Bureau of Gambling Control (Bureau), 17 Department of Justice, State of California. 18 During the evidentiary hearing, Presiding Officer Paras Modha (PO Modha), Attorney III 19 of the Commission, took official notice of the following documents: the Commission's Notice 20 and Agenda of Commission Hearing; the Commission's Conclusion of Prehearing Conference 21 letter; the Commission's Notice of Hearing with attachments (A) Norton's Application for 22 Finding of Suitability Tribal Key Employee, and (B) the Bureau's Level III Tribal Key Employee 23 Background Investigation Report; the Bureau's Statement of Reasons; and Norton's signed 24 Notice of Defense form. 25 During the evidentiary hearing, PO Modha accepted into evidence Exhibits 1-3, Bates 26 Nos. Complainant's 0001-0179, offered by the Bureau and identified on the Bureau's Evidentiary 27 Hearing Exhibits Index, pursuant to a stipulation between the parties. 28 PO Modha also accepted into evidence Exhibit A, which consists of: (1) a letter of 1

reference from Christopher Clark, Director of Table Games at the Hard Rock Casino in Cincinnati; and (2) a letter of reference from Rowell Felicitas, offered by Norton, pursuant to a stipulation between the parties.

FINDINGS OF FACT

Procedural History

- 1. On or about August 10, 2020, Norton started working as a Table Games Supervisor for the Viejas Casino and Resort (Viejas Casino).
- 2. On or about September 2, 2020, the Bureau received an Initial Application for Finding of Suitability Tribal Key Employee and Supplemental Background Investigation Information form (Supplemental) (collectively, Application) from Norton to work as a Table Games Supervisor, a key employee position, at Viejas Casino. The Bureau issued Tribal Key Employee Record No. TRKE-022326 to Norton.
- 3. On or about June 15, 2022, the Commission received a Level III Tribal Key Employee Background Investigation Report (Background Report) on Norton from the Bureau. In the Background Report, the Bureau states that Norton was convicted of two misdemeanor offenses, and the circumstances that led to the convictions demonstrate that Norton is not a person of good character, honesty, or integrity, and that Norton poses a threat to the interest of the state. Based on the foregoing, the Bureau recommends that the Commission deny Norton's Application.
- 4. On or about August 11, 2022, the Commission voted to refer the consideration of Norton's Application to a Gambling Control Act (Act) evidentiary hearing pursuant to CCR sections 12060(a) and 12054(a)(4).
- 5. On or about August 12, 2022, the Commission sent a letter to Norton, via certified and regular mail, notifying him that the Commission referred the consideration of his Application to an evidentiary hearing and included a blank Notice of Defense form for Norton to complete and return to the Commission.
- 6. On or about September 8, 2022, the Commission received a signed Notice of Defense from Norton requesting an evidentiary hearing on the consideration of his Application. On his Notice of Defense form, Norton also requested that all notices and written communications for

December 2015 to November 2016.

- 17. Norton worked as a Table Games Supervisor for Red Rock Casino in Nevada from December 2016 to August 2020.
- 18. On or about August 10, 2020 the Tribal Gaming Agency for Viejas Casino granted Norton a two-year conditional license due to Norton's unsatisfactory credit. The conditional license included several terms and conditions related to Norton's employment and addressing his unsatisfactory credit. Norton has complied with the terms of the conditional license and has worked as a Table Games Supervisor for Viejas Casino from August 2020 to the present.
- 19. There was no evidence presented of any derogatory information relating to Norton's employment history in controlled gambling.

Norton's Criminal History

20. On or about December 20, 2006, Norton was convicted by the Boone County Circuit Court in Kentucky, upon a plea of guilty, of the following: (1) violating Kentucky Revised Statutes section 530.070(1)(d), unlawful transaction with a minor in the third degree, a misdemeanor; and (2) violating Kentucky Revised Statutes section 525.070(1)(a), harassment (physical contact) no injury, a misdemeanor, in the case *Commonwealth v. Norton*, Case Number 06-CR-00362. On or about January 18, 2008, Norton was sentenced to 12 months imprisonment and two years of probation, and ordered to pay court costs. Norton's Motion for Probation was granted and Norton's sentence was amended to 90 days in jail with work release.

Norton's Application

- 21. Norton's Application consists of two parts. The first part is three pages and requests applicant information. Norton signed the first part of the Application on or about July 1, 2020.
- 22. The second part of the Application is the Supplemental, which is eight pages and contains ten sections. The Supplemental requires that the applicant disclose, among other things, their criminal history information.
- 23. Section (9) of the Supplemental requires an applicant to disclose their criminal history information. Norton accurately checked the box marked "yes" to the question "Have you ever been **convicted** of a crime, pled guilty or plea of nolo contendere (no contest) to a crime?"

(Emphasis in original.) For each criminal conviction, the applicant is required to disclose the approximate date of the conviction, the court location, and the crime for which the applicant was convicted. On his Supplemental, Norton disclosed both of his misdemeanor convictions and provided all of the required information. Norton also included the word "Stalking" to describe his convictions even though it was not in the record of conviction. Norton also provided a statement indicating the circumstances that led to the convictions.

24. Section (10) of the Supplemental is a Declaration, signed by Norton on or about July 1, 2020, in which Norton declared under penalty of perjury that the information provided in the Supplemental was "true, accurate, and complete."

Norton's Communications with the Bureau

25. In written responses to various inquiries from the Bureau, Norton explained in detail the circumstances leading to his misdemeanor convictions. Norton also sent a copy of his plea agreement to the Bureau.

Melissa Avent's Testimony During the Evidentiary Hearing

26. Melissa Avent (Avent) is a Staff Services Manager I with the Bureau. During the evidentiary hearing, Avent testified that she has worked for the Bureau for 17 years, including as a Staff Services Manager I for ten years. Avent testified that she supervises nine employees that conduct background investigations on tribal employees, including the analyst who conducted the background investigation of Norton. Avent testified that she played a role in reviewing Norton's Application, conducting the background investigation, and preparing the Background Report. Avent testified that the Bureau needs an applicant's criminal history information to make a recommendation on their application. Avent testified that the Bureau's bases for recommending the denial of Norton's Application are Norton's two misdemeanor convictions, and that the circumstances that led to the convictions demonstrate that Norton is not a person of good character, honesty, or integrity, and that Norton poses a threat to the interest of the state.

27. Regarding the specific application and background investigation process for Norton, Avent testified that Norton disclosed his misdemeanor convictions on his Application and provided a copy of his plea agreement to the Bureau. Avent also testified that Norton provided

responses to the Bureau's several requests for additional information.

Norton's Testimony During the Evidentiary Hearing

- 28. During the evidentiary hearing, Norton testified in detail regarding his two misdemeanor convictions, including the factual circumstances leading to the convictions. Norton acknowledged that he made a tremendous mistake and testified that he regrets the incidents leading to the convictions, that he should have known better, and that he does not defend his actions.
- 29. Norton testified that he disclosed his two misdemeanor convictions to Viejas Casino, the Bureau, and the Commission, and that he has no prior or subsequent criminal convictions.
- 30. Norton testified that has been licensed to work in controlled gambling in three other states (Nevada, Indiana, and Ohio), that his work history is excellent, and that he has had no write-ups during his lengthy career in controlled gambling. Norton also testified that he has been promoted at work and received an award certificate for training people at work.

Sandy Ortmeier's Testimony During the Evidentiary Hearing

31. Sandy Ortmeier (Ortmeier) is the Licensing Manager of the Viejas Gaming

Commission and has worked there for 28 years. During the evidentiary hearing, Ortmeier testified that she took a lot of things into consideration when she ran a background check on Norton and Norton's criminal history revealed two misdemeanor convictions. Ortmeier testified that Norton was truthful on his license application, that the convictions were beyond ten years from the date of his application, that he is licensed by other states, and that there was no other criminal history. Ortmeier testified that Norton was issued a conditional license with a list of criteria and that Norton met those conditions. Ortmeier testified that Norton has excelled at his position, does everything asked of him, and has not received any write-ups. Ortmeier also testified that Norton is well-liked and well-respected by peers and management, is a good employee and mentor, and is never late. Ortmeier requested that the Commission approve Norton's Application.

Norton's Letters of Reference

32. Christopher Clark (Clark), Director of Table Games at the Hard Rock Casino in Cincinnati, provided a letter of reference in support of Norton's Application on or about January

- 16, 2022. Clark states that he has had the privilege of working with, supervising, and managing Norton, and that he cannot recall ever having a bad interaction. Clark states that Norton was an honest and hardworking team member, has a wealth of experience and gaming knowledge, and has respect for policies for procedures. Clark also states that Norton is fun, outgoing, and is a talented and experienced dealer.
- 33. Sandi Ortmeier (Ortmeier), Licensing Manager for the Viejas Gaming Commission, provided a letter of reference in support of Norton's Application on or about June 8, 2022. Ortmeier states that Norton's license application was complete and that he fully disclosed his two misdemeanor convictions. Ortmeier states that Norton is compliant with the terms of his conditional license, has improved his credit, and that there have been no verbal or disciplinary actions in his file. Ortmeier also states that Norton has been cooperative and prompt when responding to the Bureau's correspondence and questions.
- 34. Rowell Felicitas (Felicitas) provided a letter of reference in support of Norton's Application on or about January 17, 2023. Felicitas states that he has known Norton since 2020 in both a professional and personal capacity. Felicitas states that Norton is sincere, honest, trustworthy, hard-working, diligent, and a person with high moral and ethical standards. Felicitas also states that Norton pays attention to detail, listens to his fellow team members, and always goes out of his way to help others succeed.

Assessment of Norton's Suitability for Licensure

- 35. For the reasons provided below, the Commission finds that Norton has met his burden of proving his suitability for licensure. Therefore, Norton's Application is approved.
- Norton provided information required by the Act
 - 36. All of the information requested on an application has been considered through the legislative and regulatory processes and determined necessary in order for the Commission to discharge its duties properly. An applicant is neither expected, nor permitted, to determine the importance of the information requested, and instead is required to provide true, accurate, and complete information as requested. To address any issues in completing the application, and to ensure that the information disclosed on an application is "true, accurate, and complete," the

burden is on the applicant to carefully and thoroughly read the application, and to seek assistance with filling out the application if necessary. The applicant is responsible for both the information they disclose, and for failing to disclose required information, on the application. The applicant maintains this burden even if the applicant does not understand, misreads, or misinterprets a question on the application.

37. On his Supplemental, Norton accurately checked the box marked "yes" to the question "Have you ever been **convicted** of a crime, pled guilty or plea of nolo contendere (no contest) to a crime?" (Emphasis in original.) For each criminal conviction, Norton was required to disclose the approximate date of the conviction, the court location, and the crime for which he was convicted. Norton disclosed and provided the required information for his misdemeanor convictions on the Supplemental.

Norton revealed facts material to qualification

- 38. The existence of, and details regarding, an applicant's criminal history are facts material to the qualification for licensure of an applicant. For instance, they may affect the assessment of the applicant's general character, honesty, integrity, and/or ability to participate in controlled gambling. They may lead to a finding that the issuance of a license to such an applicant would be inimical to public health, safety, or welfare, or undermine public trust that the gambling operations with respect to which the license would be issued are free from criminal and dishonest elements, and would be conducted honestly. An applicant's criminal record may be sufficient to support a factual finding and legal conclusion that the applicant poses a threat to the public interest of this state, to the effective regulation and control of controlled gambling, or creates or enhances the dangers of unsuitable, unfair, or illegal practices, methods, and activities in the conduct of controlled gambling or in the carrying on of the business and financial arrangements thereto. Finally, the existence of, and details regarding, an applicant's criminal convictions may reveal that the applicant is disqualified from licensure for conviction of a certain felony or a misdemeanor involving dishonesty and/or moral turpitude.
- 39. Norton revealed his complete criminal history. On his Supplemental, Norton disclosed both of his misdemeanor convictions from 2006 and provided all of the required information.

Norton also included the word "Stalking" to describe one of his convictions even though it was not in the record of conviction. Norton also provided a statement describing the circumstances that led to the convictions.

Norton met his burden under the Act

- 40. An applicant demonstrates good character, honesty, and integrity by providing truthful, accurate, and complete responses on their Application and Supplemental, in response to Bureau inquiries during the Bureau's background investigation, and while testifying during the evidentiary hearing. An applicant demonstrates good character and integrity by complying with the law. An applicant also demonstrates good character and integrity by accepting responsibility for their actions and demonstrating rehabilitation from past criminal behavior.
- 41. Conversely, an applicant demonstrates a lack of good character, honesty, and integrity by omitting pertinent information, and providing untrue, misleading, and/or contradictory information on their Application and Supplemental, in response to Bureau inquiries, and while testifying during the evidentiary hearing. An applicant demonstrates a lack of good character and integrity by failing to comply with the law, particularly with regard to repeated or egregious criminal actions. An applicant also demonstrates a lack of good character and integrity by failing to take responsibility for their actions and continuing with a pattern of criminal behavior.
- 42. Norton was convicted of two misdemeanor convictions: unlawful transaction with a minor in the third degree and harassment (physical contact) no injury. These convictions occurred on or about December 20, 2006. Norton's convictions reflect poorly on his character and integrity. Not unreasonably, the Bureau's bases for recommending the denial of Norton's Application are Norton's two misdemeanor convictions, and the circumstances that led to the convictions.
- 43. However, there are a number of factors that support a finding that Norton currently has the requisite good character, honesty, and integrity to receive a finding of suitability. Norton accurately disclosed both of his misdemeanor convictions on his Application and on his application with Viejas Casino. Norton provided details regarding the misdemeanor convictions in writing to the Bureau and voluntarily provided a copy of his plea agreement to the Bureau.

Norton was cooperative and responded to Bureau inquiries throughout the application process. Norton testified in detail regarding his misdemeanor convictions and the factual circumstances that led to them during the evidentiary hearing, and his testimony was credible. Norton acknowledged that he made a tremendous mistake and testified that he regrets the incidents leading to the convictions, that he should have known better, and that he does not defend his actions. Additionally, since 2006 Norton has not suffered any criminal convictions.

- 44. Norton submitted three letters of reference emphasizing that he does not pose a threat to the public interest of this state, or to the effective regulation and control of controlled gambling, or create or enhance the dangers of unsuitable, unfair, or illegal practices, methods, and activities in the conduct of controlled gambling.
- 45. Ortmeier, Licensing Manager for the Viejas Gaming Commission, took the time to attend the hearing and testify on Norton's behalf. Ortmeier fully supports Norton's Application.
- 46. Norton testified that he has been licensed to work in controlled gambling in three other states (Nevada, Indiana, and Ohio), that his work history is excellent, and that he has had no write-ups during his lengthy career in controlled gambling. Norton also testified that he has been promoted at work and received an award certificate for training people at work. Finally, there was evidence presented that Norton has had an excellent work history in controlled gambling since 2010.
- 47. Based on the foregoing, Norton has met his burden of demonstrating that he is a person of good character, honesty, and integrity. Also, Norton has met his burden of demonstrating that he is a person whose prior activities, criminal record, if any, reputation, habits, and associations do not pose a threat to the public interest of this state, or to the effective regulation and control of controlled gambling, or create or enhance the dangers of unsuitable, unfair, or illegal practices, methods, and activities in the conduct of controlled gambling.
- 48. All documentary and testimonial evidence submitted by the parties that is not specifically addressed in this Decision and Order was considered but not used by the Commission in making its determination on Norton's Application.

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LEGAL CONCLUSIONS

2 | Applicable Statutes and Regulations

49. Every Gaming Employee shall obtain, and thereafter maintain current, a valid tribal gaming license, which shall be subject to biennial renewal. Tribal-State Compact between the State of California and the Viejas Band of Kumeyaay Indians section 6.4.3(a).

- 50. Except as provided in subdivision (e), the Tribe will not employ or continue to employ, any person whose application to the State Gaming Agency for a determination of suitability, or for a renewal of such a determination, has been denied or has expired without renewal. Tribal-State Compact between the State of California and the Chukchansi Indians sections 6.4.3(d).
- 51. The Tribal Gaming Agency shall require the applicant also to file an application with the State Gaming Agency, prior to issuance of a temporary or permanent tribal gaming license, for a determination of suitability for licensure under the Gambling Control Act. Investigation and disposition of that application shall be governed entirely by State law, and the State Gaming Agency shall determine whether the Applicant would be found suitable for licensure in a gambling establishment subject to that State Gaming Agency's jurisdiction. Tribal-State Compact between the State of California and the Chukchansi Indians section 6.5.6.
- 52. The Act is an exercise of the police power of the state for the protection of the health, safety, and welfare of the people of the State of California, and shall be liberally construed to effectuate those purposes. Business and Professions Code section 19971.
- 53. Public trust that permissible gambling will not endanger public health, safety, or welfare requires that comprehensive measures be enacted to ensure that gambling is free from criminal and corruptive elements, that it is conducted honestly and competitively, and that it is conducted in suitable locations. Business and Professions Code section 19801(g).
- 54. "Finding of suitability" means a finding that a person meets the qualification criteria described in subdivisions (a) and (b) of Section 19857, and that the person would not be disqualified from holding a state gambling license on any of the grounds specified in Section 19859. Business and Professions Code section 19805(j).

- 55. The Commission has the responsibility of assuring that licenses, approvals, and permits are not issued to, or held by, unqualified or disqualified persons, or by persons whose operations are conducted in a manner that is inimical to the public health, safety, or welfare. Business and Professions Code section 19823(a)(1).
- 56. An "unqualified person" means a person who is found to be unqualified pursuant to the criteria set forth in Section 19857, and "disqualified person" means a person who is found to be disqualified pursuant to the criteria set forth in Section 19859. Business and Professions Code section 19823(b).
- 57. The Commission shall have all powers necessary and proper to enable it fully and effectually to carry out the policies and purposes of this chapter. Business and Professions Code section 19824.
- 58. The Commission has the power to deny any application for a license, permit, or approval for any cause deemed reasonable by the Commission. Business and Professions Code section 19824(b).
- 59. The Commission has the power to take actions deemed to be reasonable to ensure that no ineligible, unqualified, disqualified, or unsuitable persons are associated with controlled gambling activities. Business and Professions Code section 19824(d).
- 60. The burden of proving his or her qualifications to receive any license from the Commission is on the applicant. Business and Professions Code section 19856(a) and CCR section 12060(j).
- 61. No gambling license shall be issued unless, based on all of the information and documents submitted, the Commission is satisfied that the applicant is a person of good character, honesty, and integrity. Business and Professions Code section 19857(a).
- 62. No gambling license shall be issued unless, based on all of the information and documents submitted, the Commission is satisfied that the applicant is a person whose prior activities, criminal record, if any, reputation, habits, and associations do not pose a threat to the public interest of this state, or to the effective regulation and control of controlled gambling, or create or enhance the dangers of unsuitable, unfair, or illegal practices, methods, and activities in

1 **ORDER** 2 1. Arron Norton's Application for Tribal Key Employee Finding of Suitability is 3 APPROVED. 4 2. No costs are awarded. 5 3. Each side to pay its own attorneys' fees. 6 This Order is effective on August 10, 2023. 7 Dated: ___8/10/2023 8 Signature: 9 Paula LaBrie, Chair 10 Dated: ___8/10/2023 Cathleen Galgiani 11 Signature: _ 12 Cathleen Galgiani, Commissioner 13 Dated: ___8/10/2023 14 Signature: _ 15 Edward Yee, Commissioner 16 DocuSigned by: Dated: _ 8/10/2023 William Liu 17 Signature: 18 William Liu, Commissioner 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 14

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