

Good afternoon, my name is Russ Mortland. As a proud American and a dedicated member of the Palermo, Maine community, I am here to submit this written testimony on behalf of my wife and our four children.

For the past seven years, we have journeyed across the country in our RV, working as travel nurses and searching for the perfect place to build our forever home. Both my wife and I were raised in Maine, and like many young people, we didn't fully appreciate its beauty and allure until we had explored 47 other states. Throughout our travels, we've encountered countless people who fondly recall their summer vacations in Maine. While their knowledge of Maine might be limited to places like Kennebunk and Bar Harbor, their perception of Maine and its people remains consistent: we are seen as hardy, resourceful, independent, caring and embodying a 'live and let live' philosophy. If I told them our state allowed eminent domain and our political officials were considering using it for a half-baked, unproven, money-grabbing solar project they wouldn't believe me. I didn't believe it either until some lovely community members raised the alarm and brought this to our attention.

*A quick note on solar. For the past 7 years of traveling full-time in our RV and now living on our sunny hilltop in Palermo our primary power comes from solar. I'm not against solar power or renewable energies. I am against this asinine project and how it's being rammed through with minimal regard to the long term consequences of such a reckless decision.

It was during the early days of the pandemic, while stranded in the Arizona desert, that my wife and I resolved to return to Maine. By God's grace, we found a 10-acre parcel atop a beautiful hill in Palermo. Each morning, we are greeted by sunlight streaming through our bedroom window, signaling the start of a day filled with gratitude. As we sit on our front deck, sipping coffee and watching the sunrise over Sheepscot Pond and the distant hills, we dream of the home we'll one day build, of the back to the land existence we'll provide for our children – a dream that represents years of hard work and saving and sacrifice.

Yet, this dream, along with our views and our pursuit of an honest, healthy lifestyle for our family, is under threat. The prospect of our land being taken away for the benefit of a private corporation, purportedly to save Mainers a few dollars on electric bills, is not only shocking but deeply distressing. For the first time in my adult life, I feel utterly powerless against the baffling decisions being made around me. I can no longer escape to Maine as my plan to escape the craziness, the craziness is being built in my backyard!

What we risk losing to eminent domain is significant, but it's just a fraction of what many in Maine stand to lose – and what others have already lost. The idea of seizing someone's land strikes me as profoundly un-American and contrary to the values we hold dear in Maine. Such acts are a shameful part of our past and should not be perpetuated in our present or future.

I urge you to consider the real consequences of this kind of land appropriation. It's not just about the land; it's about the destruction of dreams and livelihoods. Please think about the kind of legacy we are leaving when we endorse such actions.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.