

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with the Committee. I am testifying today to express my strong support for LD 958, An Act to Prohibit Eminent Domain on Tribal Lands. I speak as a proud Mainer, an outdoorswoman, a human rights professional, and a member of the Wabanaki Ally Team at First Parish Unitarian Universalist Church in Portland.

This legislation is a necessary and long-overdue step in recognizing the sovereignty of the Wabanaki Nations and ensuring that their lands are protected from unjust seizure. It corrects an inequity that has persisted since the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act, which uniquely subjects the Wabanaki Nations to state eminent domain powers that do not apply to most other federally recognized tribes.

Eminent domain has historically been used as a tool of dispossession against Indigenous peoples, and Maine is no exception. A stark example is the state's 1925 use of eminent domain to seize land from the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik to construct Route 190—an action taken without tribal consent or meaningful consultation. LD 958 would ensure that such injustices do not happen again, aligning Maine's policies with federal standards that protect tribal lands from state interference.

This bill is not just about preventing land seizures; it is about fairness, respect, and the recognition of the Wabanaki Nations as sovereign entities. The ability of a government to control its own land is a fundamental aspect of sovereignty. By passing LD 958, Maine would affirm its commitment to working with, rather than against, the Wabanaki Nations in matters that affect their communities. Consultation and collaboration should be the standard—not unilateral state action that disregards tribal authority or reinforces historic wrongs.

Additionally, prohibiting eminent domain on tribal lands fosters stronger relationships between the state and the Wabanaki Nations. If a project truly serves the public interest, then it should be pursued through partnership and negotiation, not coercion. LD 958 provides a framework for respectful engagement, ensuring that decisions affecting tribal lands are made with tribal leaders at the table.

I urge the committee to support LD 958, voting Ought to Pass, and uphold the principle that no government should have the power to take Indigenous land without consent. This bill is a step toward justice, correcting a historical wrong and ensuring that the Wabanaki Nations receive the same protections as other federally recognized tribes. I urge members of the Committee to support LD 958 and stand on the side of fairness, sovereignty, and respect for tribal rights.

Thank you for your time and consideration.