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LD 958

I am a resident of Brunswick, Maine and have spent my career as an anthropologist working alongside Indigenous Peoples here in the US and abroad. I have learned about their histories and lived experiences and am humbled by all they have endured over the course of the last five centuries of colonization. The Wabanaki continue to live here in Maine, practicing their cultures and living their values despite all the atrocities they have faced. The Wabanaki contribute to our state in many ways and LD 958 – An Act to Prohibit Eminent Domain on Tribal Lands - will go a long way to restore fairness and respect to Wabanaki Nations' sovereignty over their lands. No one should have their land taken without consultation or agreement. LD 958 removes the state of Maine's power to take Wabanaki Nations' tribal land through eminent domain, a protection already afforded to almost all other federally recognized tribes. Taking tribal land without consultation is against federal policy. Federal law protects most tribal nations from state-level eminent domain, but the 1980 Settlement Acts have resulted in the Wabanaki Nations in Maine being unfairly excluded from these federal protections.

History shows the harm of eminent domain on Wabanaki lands. Maine Route 190, which cuts through the heart of the Passamaquoddy Reservation at Sipayik, was taken by eminent domain in 1925—a decision made without tribal input. LD 958 would ensure that no such action happens again without tribal consultation.

This bill encourages collaboration, not conflict. If a project could truly benefit the public, the state, and the tribes, the state should work with tribal leaders to find a solution. This legislation is a protective measure to guarantee consultation and mutual agreement before any action is taken on tribal lands. It ensures the tribes have a voice – which is not a lot to ask in my opinion.

Bottom line: LD 958 is a step towards justice and fairness that the State absolutely can not ignore. What does the State really have to lose by including the Wabanaki in decision-making? It benefits the State to have Tribes engaged and charting a path for the future that undoubtedly benefits that ripple across the State. There is no reason they should be treated differently from other federally recognized tribes. This bill ensures fairness, respects sovereignty, and prevents future injustices. LD 958 restores the fundamental principle that the Wabanaki Nations are sovereign governments with inherent power to regulate their territories.