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55 Portland Street

Portland, ME 04101

207.775.0026

info@preblestreet.org

www.preblestreet.org



United Way
of Southern Maine



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

My name is Julie Orrego, and I am the Advocacy Supervisor at Preble Street. Preble Street operates 16 programs throughout Maine, and its staff works daily alongside hundreds of individuals and families who struggle with housing insecurity. Our mission is to provide accessible, barrier-free services to empower people experiencing problems with homelessness, housing, hunger, and poverty and to advocate for solutions to these problems.

Preble Street supports LD 958, An Act to Prohibit Eminent Domain on Tribals Lands, because it addresses the issues of sovereignty and justice for the Wabanaki Nation in Maine. This legislation restores the Wabanaki Nation's right to govern its lands by ensuring that the State of Maine does not take tribal lands without input or consent.

Federal law generally protects most tribal nations from state-level eminent domain actions; however, Maine's 1980 Indian Land Claims Settlement Act excluded the Wabanaki Nations from these protections, causing harm and undermining the tribes' sovereignty. LD 958 will correct this injustice by ensuring that the Wabanaki peoples are no longer excluded from the protections afforded to other tribes nationwide.

Historically, there have been harmful impacts due to eminent domain on Wabanaki lands. In 1925, Maine Route 190 was created without consultation and consent from the tribal community. This route cuts through the heart of the Passamaquoddy Reservation at Sipayik. This action is a stark example of disrespect for tribal sovereignty and failure to honor the rights of the Wabanaki Nations. This proposed legislation will ensure that these injustices are not repeated and that any future actions on tribal lands will only be taken after consulting with tribal leaders.

Lastly, this bill encourages collaboration amongst the State and tribes. Suppose there is a project or initiative that will benefit the public, state, and tribes. In that case, the state should work directly with tribal leaders to reach a mutually agreed-upon solution. LD 958 ensures that Wabanaki Nations have a meaningful role in the decision-making process that affects their land and people. This bill is a protective measure that guarantees partnership and mutual agreement before any action is taken on tribal lands.

Preble Street asks you to pass this legislation. No one should have their land taken without agreement, primarily indigenous peoples who have lived on this land for thousands of years. The power to take land through eminent domain should not be exercised by the State over tribal nations without their agreement, primarily when such actions result in the loss of sacred and historically significant lands. This protection is already afforded to other federally recognized tribes across the country, and it is time that the Wabanaki people are granted the same protections.

Thank you for your consideration.

