

Chair Carney and Chair Kuhn and the distinguished members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Amelia Neilson, I live in Arrowsic, Maine, and I am in the field of environmental conservation. I am writing today in **support of LD 958** An Act to Prohibit Eminent Domain on Tribal Lands.

I feel strongly that this bill is a small but critical step in improving the relationship between the state of Maine and Wabanaki Nations. Protecting tribal lands from Eminent Domain is essential for honoring tribal sovereignty and is only fair - **Maine's Nations deserve the same rights as other federally recognized tribes.**

In the past two years, I have worked in land stewardship, and have had the opportunity to travel up and down the coast as well as far into the Northwoods for my work on preserved lands. I have had the privilege of experiencing Maine's incredibly beautiful forests, mountains, lakes, rivers, and rocky coastal islands. I have also had the opportunity through my work to delve into the history of Wabanaki-Maine relations, especially around treaties and the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980.

This juxtaposition of working on conserved lands - traveling along roads such as Route 190 that were in fact created with eminent domain - and learning more about the history of land dispossession has impressed on me the importance of protecting the rights of Nations to retain and manage their lands without the threat of the state acting unilaterally to further that dispossession. **Federal policy protects tribal lands from state level eminent domain, and the 1980 Settlement Act misstepped** when it limited tribal protections here in Maine. LD 958 is a critical step to helping rectify this mistake.

Furthermore, **the State of Maine prides itself on its lands**: we tout our woods and waters as our number one asset as a state. But we don't talk about the way these lands were taken from the people who were here already. As we face the very real effects of a changing environment and the resulting damages to our beloved natural spaces - from spruce budworm to Emerald Ash Borer to intense winter storms to loss of stable fisheries - as well as the growing need for housing to address our current crises, everyone living here will need to work together to address challenges and difficult transitions. **Demand for development will only increase. As a state, we need to be smart about how we proceed**, and ensure that we are protecting these cherished places and the people who live in and steward them.

LD 958 will allow for greater cooperation between the State and Tribes. Instead of fostering resentment and harm, it will ensure that Tribal Nations have a seat at the table during land use debates. In a critical, divisive time, we have an opportunity with this bill to commit to working with one another rather than against.

Thank you for your time. I strongly urge you to **support LD 958** as a way to **ensure fairness and prevent further injustices** against Wabanaki peoples.

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