

**Testimony of Chief Clarissa Sabattis, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, In Support of
LD 1900 – An Act to Bring Parity to the State’s Recognition of the Wabanaki Nations’ Authority
to Provide Electric Power Districts and Child Support Enforcement
May 16, 2025**

Good morning Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Clarissa Sabattis, and I am the Chief of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. I am here today to urge the Committee to vote “ought to pass” on LD 1900, *An Act to Bring Parity to the State’s Recognition of the Wabanaki Nations’ Authority to Provide Electric Power Districts and Child Support Enforcement*. LD 1900 recognizes and enhances the authority of our Tribe in two critical areas under state law: Child Support Enforcement and Electric Power Generation.

Child Support Enforcement

- The Maliseet Tribal Court began providing judicial services to the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians community in January 2024 through our Health and Wellness Court. The Health and Wellness Court, which reduces the burden on the state court system in Aroostook County, has been a great success. Our community is eager for additional services to support strong and healthy tribal families.
- To protect our children and ensure they have the resources they need to thrive, the Maliseet Tribal Court will soon begin hearing parental rights and child support cases. While there is a well-established formula used to determine the amount of child support, it is the enforcement of the support order that often proves to be the most challenging. Custodial parents and child support agencies need the tools to enforce child support orders through our Tribal Court system.
- State law currently provides the Penobscot Nation with an important tool to help enforce child support orders. If a person ordered to provide monetary support for a child fails to do so, the Penobscot National Tribal Court may, after written notice and the opportunity for a hearing, certify the person to a state board or commission, which then must revoke the person’s license until they come into compliance with the child support order. This could include, for example, a state hunting or fishing license or even a state professional license.
- While it is rare for the court to exercise this enforcement option, it is an important tool for custodial parents and child support agencies seeking to enforce Tribal Court child support orders. This enforcement tool is also a powerful statement of recognition and respect for the essential role of the Tribal Court in protecting tribal children, and it ensures that non-custodial parents do not ignore Tribal Court orders.

- LD 1900 would give this same child support enforcement tool to the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, increasing parity among Tribal Courts.
- We are well positioned and prepared to implement this enforcement tool. The Maliseet Tribal Court works closely with the Penobscot Nation Tribal Court. Our Tribe has adopted many of the same laws and procedures for our Maliseet Tribal Court that the Penobscot Nation has adopted for the Penobscot Nation Tribal Court. And our Maliseet Tribal Court Judge also serves as the Penobscot Nation Tribal Court Judge. He has significant experience working with child support agencies and state boards and commissions to enforce Tribal Court support orders.

Electric Power Districts

- A government's ability to deliver power to its residents, businesses, and government facilities is critical to economic development and effective local government. The Wabanaki Nations are located in rural areas of Maine where power infrastructure is less developed and more vulnerable. Energy independence and resilience is of tremendous value to the health and welfare of our tribal communities.
- The current electrical grid system in our Tribe's area is not sufficient to sustain full electrification. Our Tribe's goal is to generate enough power to achieve energy self-sufficiency, to provide for the needs of all our tribal housing and government buildings, and to support sustainable economic development on our lands. We are exploring solar, wind, and other renewable energy sources.
- State law already provides the Passamaquoddy Tribe and the Penobscot Nation with the same authority as municipalities to form power districts on their respective Indian territory. The tribal power districts may furnish electric power transmission, distribution, and supply services within the district, subject to the approval of the Maine Public Utilities Commission. Tribal power districts may also generate or manufacture electricity within the district and purchase or sell electricity for use within the district.
- LD 1900 would provide this same authority to establish and operate tribal power districts to the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation on our respective trust lands. This would bring parity to the Wabanaki Nations with respect to developing and delivering electric power and infrastructure on our tribal lands.
- Having the ability to establish our own power district is an important tool for advancing the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians' energy sustainability and climate resilience goals. This would also allow us to gain access to federal funding for tribal utility projects. Bringing more infrastructure dollars to the State benefits all Mainers.

Please join me in supporting LD 1900. This bill will help to make our communities stronger.