

LD 343 “An Act To Set Aside Funds from Federal Block Grants for Certain Communities”  
March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Good morning, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Esther Mitchell, I am a member of the Penobscot Nation and I work as a public health professional.

Today I am here as a public citizen, a tribal citizen, to speak on LD 343, to set aside funds from federal block grants received by the Department of Health and Human services. I am here to speak in favor of creating a tribal set aside from each DHHS federal block grant. I fully support setting aside 12 percent of funding going to the 5 tribal communities. This funding, would facilitate Maine DHHS in achieving their block grant requirements related to their work with Tribes. Requirements, that historically, have not been met, nor achieved meaningful results for tribal people.

As a public health professional working with tribal communities, as well as, someone who lives in a tribal community, I see the devastating impacts of generational trauma, despair, and health outcomes daily. I also see incredible strength, resiliency, and deep connections to our culture. These assets coupled with increased funding capacity, can make a positive and dramatic impact for our people. The Tribes and their tribal public health entity are eager to collaborate with Maine DHHS and help to meet each block grant requirement related to tribal nations. In the long history of block grant funding at DHHS, this is the second bill, LD 343, the first submitted last session, that attempts to resolve the longstanding issues of limited tribal engagement, ineffective communication, and lack of tribal funding.

Communication must be improved between the State and local tribal communities, this is not a surprise to many of us in this room. Further, we must respect the government-to-government relationship between the Tribes and the State of Maine; and allow for the Tribes to self-determine how to address their community challenges. Improved communication and meaningful public policy can mitigate unintentional harm, that for many years, has plagued the Tribes in Maine. LD 343 attempts to mitigate the harm associated with a long history of miscommunication and inadequate funding, by setting aside funding for the Tribes to self-determine how to address their community challenges while aligning with block grant requirements and priorities.

Please consider voting in support of LD 343, which creates set aside funding for the Tribes and their public health infrastructure from the federal block grants. This is critical for the future health and wellness of our tribal communities. I appreciate your time and attention on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Esther Mitchell  
Penobscot Nation Citizen  
Indian Island, ME