

TRIBAL CHIEF

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TRIBAL COUNCIL

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Suzanne Desiderio

Cathy St John

William Tomah

Mary Tomah

Crystal Tucker

HOULTON BAND OF MALISEET INDIANS

88 BELL ROAD
LITTLETON, ME 04730

www.maliseets.com

Administration

(207) 532-4273

In-State

1-800-564-8524

Out-of-State

1-800-545-8524

Fax

(207) 532-26

Senator Ned Gratwich, Chair
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair
Committee on Health and Human Services

March 24, 2021

Greetings Senator Gratwick, Representative Meyer and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Clarissa Sabattis, I am the Tribal Chief of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. I am addressing you today in support of LD 343, "An Act to Set Aside Funds from Federal Block Grants for Certain Communities".

As the leader of our Tribal Nation, I am responsible for the health, safety and welfare our tribal citizens. We currently have a life expectancy of approximately 56 years old, in comparison to the State of Maine at 78.7. Though this number has risen over recent years, it still remains far too low. As a Registered Nurse and Public Health Professional with many years of experience working not only in Maliseet territory, but within other Wabanaki Communities, I am well aware that this the result of a combination of determinants such as socioeconomic conditions and behavioral risk factors. Our citizens experience health disparities disproportionate to any other population in Maine, and as leaders we are challenged with significantly underfunded programs to address these existing disparities.

Although block grant funds are allocated to the state, a portion of these funds are intended to help the Tribal Nations in Maine. With the land claims settlement act in place, our ability to supplement programs can be challenging, as this act has resulted in any taxes HBMI could collect as a government going to other local and state governments, and has barriers to economic development. Access to these funds intended to serve our citizens will not only bolster programs with limited resources but will also honor our self-determination as tribal nations. Putting the Tribe's in the driver's seat will allow us to support our own culturally responsive programs, allowing us to strengthen our efforts to prevent and address compounding complex public health issues.

Today I ask you to join me in support of LD 343. This bill is not only an equitable solution, but I firmly believe it will be more impactful than the current funding structure. Thank you for your time, consideration and support.