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# HOULTON BAND OF MALISEET INDIANS

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## **Testimony in support of LD 958, *An Act to Prohibit Eminent Domain on Tribal Lands***

**Hon. Clarissa Sabattis, Tribal Chief, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians**

Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary/Maine State Legislature

April 4, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary.

My name is Clarissa Sabattis, I am a citizen and the current Chief of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. Wolastoq or “Beautiful River” refers to the St John. We are a riverine people, Wolastoqewiyik, people of the beautiful river, or as you know us, Maliseet or St John’s Indians. Our people continue to inhabit our ancestral territory, the St John Watershed, where we have lived for thousands of years. Our reservation is located on the Meduxnekeag River near the Town of Houlton, Maine.

I am here today to testify in support LD 958, sponsored by House Minority Leader Faulkingham. This bill will amend the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act and the Mi’kmaq Nation Restoration Act to the taking of Wabanaki Nation’s lands by the State of Maine for public use.

As tribes, we hold a unique status as nations with the right to self-govern on our lands. Eminent domain allows another government to undermine our self-governance and self-determination. Our lands are not just property but are deeply tied to our identity. The taking of land could create both social and economic distress. It has the potential to disrupt our traditional ways of life, destroy our sacred spaces, and displace our people.

With an already difficult history that exists with this nation due to land dispossession, through actions like broken treaties and forced removals, this makes eminent domain even more problematic. Generally, states cannot take tribal lands through eminent domain, however this settlement act has put the tribes in Maine in an unequitable position and leaves us vulnerable to the possibility of future injustices and erosion of trust.

I urge you to join me in supporting this bill that protects our Wabanaki Nation’s territories. Let’s take a step forward by changing this outdated language that leaves us vulnerable. This change offers respect to our tribal nations, paving the way for relationships of mutual respect. Thank you for your time.