

Testimony of Osihkiyol Crofton-Macdonald, Tribal Ambassador, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, in Support of LD 1851 An Act to Bring Parity Among the Wabanaki Nations Regarding the Generation of Revenues from Gaming Before the Veteran and Legal Affairs Committee, Maine Legislature, May 7, 2025

Distinguished members of the VLA committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Zeke Crofton-Macdonald, I currently serve as the Tribal Ambassador for the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. I am here to testify in support of LD 1851.

As I'm sure you've heard already, LD 1851 will amend Maine Statute to include the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation in the revenue cascade from net slot machine income from Maine casinos with a commercial track.

One of the primary purposes of this bill is parity. Since the 1980 Maine Indian Claim Settlement Act, the four federally recognized tribal nations in Maine have not been treated on an equal footing. This was, in part, due to the disparity of land base and population density that existed between the different Wabanaki nations in 1980. The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation had fewer rights recognized by the State of Maine in the Settlement Act and there are many ways that we are working on catching up to the other Wabanaki Nations.

The past couple of legislative sessions, the state legislature has chosen to pass a few bills specifically intended to amend this disparity in rights. In the Parity for Wabanaki Nations bill from last session, for instance, the Maine Implementing Act was amended to allow the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation the ability to craft our own hunting and fishing laws on our land. It also updated the Implementing Act to increase the jurisdiction of our tribal court system to catch up to the rights already practiced by the Penobscot and Passamaquoddy Nations.

This bill aims to continue the effort to amend past mistakes and bring equal opportunities to the Houlton Band of Maliseets and Mi'kmaq Nations.

The pursuit of equality was a main driving force behind the creation of this bill. We have strong alliances with the other Wabanaki Nations, and we intentionally crafted this bill with an effort to not negatively impact any of our allies. For that reason, this bill will only focus on the potential revenue generated by Maine casinos with a commercial track, right now that only includes Hollywood Slots, and it will not impact the already established agreement between Oxford casino and the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot Nations. But it is long overdue that we achieve some form of parity in these agreements and allow the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and the Mi'kmaq Nation access to this potentially beneficial source of funding.

The potential funding from inclusion within this agreement will go directly towards the betterment of our community members. The funding will help us bring money to underfunded programs and support our economic development. Economic development in Indigenous communities means more than just businesses, but programs such as our youth and elder programs, housing for community members, education, food distribution, and other forms of assistance.

The Houlton Band has always been a strong partner with the town of Houlton and the areas surrounding our reservation lands, the advancement of our economic development is the advancement of all the towns in the area. As you likely know, funding in rural areas in our state can be sparse, this potential source of revenue could be a massive boon not just for the Houlton Band and the Mi'kmaq Nation, but for all of Aroostook County.