

**MaineHealth
Local Health Systems**

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Pen Bay Medical Center
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St. Mary's Health System

**Testimony of Lisbeth Wierda, MaineHealth
Neither For Nor Against LD 906**

**“An Act To Provide Passamaquoddy Tribal Members Access to
Clean Drinking Water”
Thursday, February 17, 2022**

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, I am Lisbeth Wierda, Research Program Director for the Maine Medical Center Research Institute’s Center for Outcomes Research and Evaluation (CORE), and I am here to testify Neither For Nor Against LD 906, “An Act To Provide Passamaquoddy Tribal Members Access to Clean Drinking Water.”

MaineHealth is a non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire through its nine acute care hospitals, physician practices, lab, home health care services, inpatient and community-based behavioral health services, and, importantly, through a broad spectrum of research at Maine Medical Center Research Institute.

I am here today not to take a position on the specifics of the bill, but, instead, to share CORE’s ongoing work, undertaken at the request of and in partnership with the Passamaquoddy Tribe, to quantify the impacts of the water quality at Pleasant Point on tribal members.

Through our partnership with the Tribe, we are working to quantify the effect of the water on cancer rates, cancer types, and adverse birth outcomes. As you have already heard, the public water for Pleasant Point, Eastport, and Perry has tested high for contaminants for more than 40 years, and in an effort to treat the water, the aggressive use of chlorine beginning in the 1980s has resulted in the production of toxic by-products.

These by-products, called trihalomethanes, have been associated with adverse health outcomes across the human lifespan, such as adverse pregnancy outcomes and liver damage. In addition, trihalomethanes are classified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a "probable human carcinogen," and studies have associated trihalomethanes with increased risks of bladder, colorectal, and renal cancers. The appearance of these by-products were first recorded in the waters serving Pleasant Point, Eastport, and Perry when regular testing began in 2004.

As part of our work, we have also begun conducting interviews with community members to gather information about the psychological and social impact of living with the contaminated water. Our Community Advisory Board has met with our researchers regularly over the past several months and shared personal accounts. During these meetings, we have heard community members describe feeling dirtier after bathing in the water, as it leaves a brown film and odor on the skin, and guilt about bathing their children in the water. We've heard from community members who have chronic skin issues that these issues resolve when they leave the community, and flare up again on their return. We've heard about the stress this has put on the tribal government and all the time, money, and resources that have been poured into addressing this problem. We've heard how this has colored their view of the world and of themselves. The personal and community harm resulting from this water crisis is undeniable.

As I mentioned, our research is ongoing, we continue to collect data about community members' experience with the water. We have recently obtained birth certificate and cancer incidence data that is awaiting analysis. Once this data is fully analyzed, we will provide the results to Tribal leadership. Our hope is that this research will shine a light on the effects this water crisis has had on this community.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.