



SUIT UP MAINE

May 3, 2021

Sen. Carney, Rep. Harnett, and honorable members of the Committee on Judiciary:

We offer this testimony in support of LD 1626, “An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act” on behalf of Suit Up Maine, an independent, all-volunteer constituent action group representing more than 5,000 Mainers in all 16 counties.

Maine’s government has a long history of breaking promises to the Wabanaki people, resulting in deeply ingrained generational trauma that remains to this day. We applaud the efforts of Maine legislators and Governor Mills for acknowledging that harm and to remaining open to remedies that restore good faith and trust between parties. The bipartisan Task Force on Changes to the Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act performed a critical role in this effort by highlighting long-standing causes of friction and making recommendations to address them, based on mutual agreement and benefit.

For four decades, the state and the courts have used language in the settlement to treat the tribes as municipalities, depriving them of sovereignty they never ceded to the state. Under the settlement, tribes in Maine have been unable to benefit from more than 150 federal laws passed since 1980, missing out on opportunities for economic development, increased access to health care, expanded environmental protections, enhanced K-12 education, and legislation that fostered job creation, ensured safe drinking water, and strengthened laws regarding prevention and prosecution of sexual assault and domestic violence. We agree with tribal leaders, who argue that the act is a “failed experiment,” and with a 2012 report from the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission, which found that the settlement “created structural inequities that have resulted in conditions that have risen to the level of human rights violations.”

The importance of the work the Task Force undertook cannot be understated. Similarly, the recommended changes to the Implementing Act are essential to demonstrating, in good faith, that Maine recognizes the Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Nation, and Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians as sovereign nations. The Wabanaki people have waited long enough. We urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 1626.

Thank you.

Kelli Whitlock Burton
Waldoboro
Co-Leader

Karin Leuthy
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Founder & Co-Leader

Kirstan Watson
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