

Testimony of Pax Christi Maine

In Support of LD 2004 An Act to Enact the Advancing Equality for Wabanaki Nations Act

Submitted for the Public Hearing Before the Maine Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on
Judiciary, May 31, 2023

Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Mary Beth DiMarco, a resident of Houlton, representing Pax Christi Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 2004 An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

Pax Christi Maine is part of a national and international movement working for peace, justice & environmental sustainability. Pax Christi, meaning "Peace of Christ", is rooted in Gospel nonviolence and Catholic Social Teaching, which includes principles of human dignity, care for God's creation, and solidarity. Support of right relationship with our Wabanaki neighbors exemplifies these principles.

All four tribes located in Maine are recognized by the federal government; yet, they don't have the same rights, responsibilities and opportunities as the other 570 federally recognized tribes. The 1980 Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act leaves tribes in Maine out of many federal bills beneficial to the other tribes in the United States. This blatant lack of equality and equity must be corrected. Not being explicitly included places undue financial burden on the Wabanaki tribes.

The 151 bills benefiting other tribes since 1980 have included legislation on health care, education, housing, economic development, environment, social welfare and other areas of community life. A recent study by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development shows that the economies of tribes in Maine developed by only 9% between 1980 and 2020, compared with 61% growth for tribes in other states. The study describes many potential benefits to both tribal members and non-tribal citizens and communities in Maine and very few possible negative effects of including the Wabanaki tribes in federal legislation designed to benefit native tribes.

It is clearly understood now, that the 1980 Land Claims Settlement Act agreement has levied a negative impact on Maine's tribes. The negative economic impact not only affects the tribes but our entire State as well.

The Maine legislature has the power to change a provision in the Settlement Act that would begin the process of placing the tribes in Maine on equal footing with the other federally recognized tribes. As a matter of equality, inclusion and justice, Pax Christi Maine supports LD2004 to start putting the tribes and rural Maine on a secure path to prosperity.

We urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 2004, An Act to Enact the Advancing Equality for Wabanaki Nations Act.