



To: Committee on Judiciary

From: Ezra Sassaman, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: May 31, 2023

Re: Testimony in favor of LD 2004: An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and other members of the Committee on Judiciary, my name is Ezra Sassaman. I am writing as a representative for Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a coalition of over 470 youth from across the state fighting for bold climate action and a just transition to a livable future in Maine. I am writing in favor of LD 2004.

At the core of MYCJ's work is climate justice; we acknowledge the climate crisis is caused by systemic failures and forms of oppression and disproportionately impacts marginalized communities. Colonialism is at the root of climate change, so when combating the climate crisis, we need to simultaneously address – and strive to undo– colonial structures.

Among the most destructive tendencies of colonization is the erasure of the rights of Indigenous people. Beginning to undo the harms towards Wabanaki tribes in Maine requires identifying laws, cultural norms, and other remnants of colonization that remain today.

One example of a colonial remnant is the 1980 Settlement Act. Because of this agreement, the Wabanaki tribes in Maine are treated differently than the other 570 federally recognized tribes across the country.

Because of this Act, when Congress passes federal legislation for tribes nationwide, the Wabanaki must be explicitly written into the legislation – unlike all other federally recognized tribes. This is an excessive burden to Wabanaki nations, who do not have the resources to track all federal legislation and lobby Congress to have them included in each individual piece of legislation.

A 2019 Suffolk University study found approximately 151 federal laws have been passed that the tribes in Maine do not have access to.¹ Many of these laws would also have improved the wellbeing of the rural areas surrounding tribal lands. In this way, unjustly hampering Wabanaki access to federal laws harms everyone.

For the above reasons, our coalition, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, urges you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 2004. Thank you.

¹ Human Rights and Indigenous Peoples Clinic, Suffolk University Law School, "[Federal Laws Enacted After October 10, 1980 For the Benefit of Indians or Indian Nations](#)", *Suffolk University*. December 2019, Accessed May 30, 2023.