



Natural Resources Council of Maine

3 Wade Street • Augusta, Maine 04330 • (207) 622-3101 • Fax: (207) 622-4343 • [www.nrcm.org](http://www.nrcm.org)

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**Testimony in support of LD 2004, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations**

**To the Judiciary Committee  
by Josh Caldwell, Climate & Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator**

**May 31, 2023**

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Josh Caldwell. I am the Climate and Clean Energy Outreach Coordinator at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM), and I am submitting testimony today in support of LD 2004, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations.

The Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit membership organization with more than 25,000 supporters statewide and beyond. For more than 60 years, NRCM has been protecting, restoring, and conserving Maine's environment, now and for future generations. We work statewide to:

- Protect the health of Maine's rivers, lakes, streams, and coastal waters;
- Promote sustainable communities through initiatives that reduce toxics pollution and waste;
- Decrease air and climate-changing pollution through energy efficiency and renewable sources;
- Conserve Maine lands and wildlife habitat, including our treasured North Woods; and
- Defend the federal environmental policies and programs that help protect Maine.

Our work is conducted upon unceded Wabanaki land, and it is incumbent upon us as an environmental advocacy organization to support the Indigenous peoples of this land. NRCM recognizes and honors the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, and Maliseet Tribes in Maine. The Wabanaki have been the stewards of the land that comprises Maine for more than 10,000 years, through periods of colonization, attempted extirpation, broken treaties, forced separation, and countless injustices and indignities. Despite this tragic history, the Wabanaki maintain spiritual, cultural, and physical connection with these lands.

We acknowledge this history and recognize Indigenous sovereignty. NRCM is committed to actively using our voices, resources, and influence to support Tribes of the Wabanaki Confederacy. We know how important it has been over the 63 years since our organization was founded — and how essential it will continue to be — to work together with the Wabanaki to protect the land, air, water, and wildlife of Maine.

While the legislation before you would not fully restore sovereignty to the Tribes in Maine, it would make significant strides toward putting the Tribes in Maine on equal footing with the other 570 federally recognized Tribes in the country. The Wabanaki are unique in their position relative to the state, which does not allow them to benefit from federal laws and or access all of the same funding as all other tribes. A report from Suffolk University published in 2019 identified 151 Federal laws passed from 1980-2019 that are “beneficial to Indians and Indian nations” but that do not apply to Tribes in Maine due to provisions in the Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Act.<sup>1</sup>

A report by the Harvard Kennedy School published in 2022 found that the inability of the Tribes in Maine to self-govern and access the same federal laws and grants as other federally recognized Tribes has had distinct and measurable negative economic impacts on the Tribes in Maine.<sup>2</sup>

Although it is late in the legislative session, we urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2004, a bill that will help put Maine Tribes on an equal footing with those that have full access to federal laws and funding intended for Tribes across the United States.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/3636>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ash.harvard.edu/publications/economic-and-social-impacts-restrictions-applicability-federal-indian-policies>