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Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

RE: LD 2004 – An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Kaitlyn Nuzzo and I am the Government Relations Director for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. **I appreciate this opportunity to submit written comments in support of LD 2004 – An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations.**

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. Guided by science, we create innovative, on-the-ground solutions to our world's toughest challenges so that nature and people can thrive together. We use a collaborative approach that engages local communities, governments, the private sector, and other partners. TNC has been leading conservation in Maine for more than 60 years and is the 12th largest landowner in the state, owning and managing roughly 300,000 acres.

Since the passage of the 1980 Settlement Act, when Congress passes federal legislation, the tribes in Maine must be explicitly written into it in order for them to benefit from it. This burden is unique to the Wabanaki tribes – it does not apply to the other 570 federally recognized tribes across the country.

This unique circumstance has put the Wabanaki Tribes and the surrounding communities at a disadvantage. A report published by Suffolk University in 2019 outlined the federal beneficial Indian laws passed by Congress since 1980. They found approximately [151 federal laws](#) which were passed by Congress but did not explicitly include the Wabanaki tribes. These federal laws cover a wide range of beneficial programs and funding opportunities, from infrastructure improvements, employment training, conservation, child care, safety, etc. – all of which are inaccessible to the Wabanaki tribes. LD 2004 would address this longstanding injustice.

When the sovereignty of Indigenous People is respected and they have the opportunity to manage lands and waters, that management contributes to durable conservation and vibrant communities. TNC has committed to work with and in support of the Wabanaki Tribes in Maine to achieve this goal. We believe that the Wabanaki Tribes ought to be treated like the other federally-recognized tribes across the country and that one of the most effective and

enduring actions we can take is to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' voices, choices, and actions. This is a major focus of TNC's work around the world.

LD 2004 is a critical step toward recognizing the rights to self-determination and sovereignty of the Wabanaki Tribes of Maine, which TNC strongly supports. We urge this committee to support LD 2004. Thank you for the opportunity to comment.