

May 31, 2023

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

Honorable members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Erika Arthur, of Freedom, Maine and I am offering testimony in favor LD 2004, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations.

For too long Wabanaki Nations have missed out on the opportunities afforded by inclusion in beneficial federal legislation. These opportunities are conveyed to the 570 other federally recognized tribes across the country; the gaps in achievement due to the exclusion of the Wabanaki tribes are stark. Take per capita income growth, for instance: between 1989 and 2020, this measure indicated a 61 percent average increase for tribal citizens in other parts of the country, while Wabanaki citizens in Maine experienced a paltry 9 percent average increase (Kalt, Besaw, Bedford, & Taylor, 2022). This is just one measure. There are many others that clearly show the losses incurred by Wabanaki communities simply because the terms of the 1980 Settlement Act created impossible barriers.

It is well past time to make the benefits of federal legislation available to Wabanaki tribes and nations. A 2019 Suffolk University report found that approximately 151 federal laws have been passed that could have benefitted the tribes in Maine. It is time to make sure that no more opportunities pass while Wabanaki people suffer for lack of access. There are no downsides to passing LD 2004 – when our Wabanaki neighbors prosper, we all prosper. Let us not stand in the way of thriving, for the Wabanaki people and all people of Maine. I urge you to vote in favor of LD 2004.