

Joe Hall
Auburn
LD 2004

To the distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Joe Hall, and I live in Auburn. My legislators are Rep. Laurel Libby and Sen. Eric Brakey. I am writing in strong support of LD 2004, An Act to Enact the Advancing Equality for Wabanaki Nations Act. I write as a professor of history at Bates College who has spent many years learning about Wabanaki history.

You will likely hear from many who will note the economic advantages of including Wabanaki Nations (the Mi'kmaq, the Maliseet, the Penobscot, and the Passamaquoddy) among the 570 other federally recognized tribes to whom federal Indian laws directly apply. You will almost certainly hear from many pointing out the absurdity of the 1980 settlement for restricting the sovereignty of Maine's First Peoples to the political status of municipalities. I add my voice to those raising these points.

I want to add another point. When I wrote to Senator Angus King last year to urge him to support Rep. Jared Golden's federal bill to extend these same federal rights to Wabanaki, he offered only one legitimate reason: the 1980 settlement was a product of negotiation between the state and the tribes. Adjustments should begin with tribal-state negotiations. (Senator Collins offered no response to a similar letter addressed to her office.) Those negotiations are what produced the recommendations from the 2019 Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act, which was a consensus document from state legislators, tribal chiefs, a designee from the Governor, a designee from the Attorney General's Office, and a member of the Maine Indian Tribal-State Commission. Subsequent negotiations have produced (and will, if necessary, revise) this bill. They are the work of careful advocates and legislators over the course of years and even decades. It is time now to act on this work and these conversations.

I am not a legislator, but I know the legislative process requires great care and that any result should have clear benefits. This bill is the product of care and will promote important benefits for Wabanaki and the state. Thank you for your part in this process, and I urge you to submit it to the full legislature as "ought to pass."

Sincerely,
Joe Hall
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