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Dear Chair Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Devon Stockmayer, I am the Advocacy Supervisor at Preble Street. I am writing to encourage you to vote in favor of LD2004: An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations.

At Preble Street, our daily work supporting people experiencing poverty and homelessness is, and must be, continually rooted in compassion, mutuality, and equity. It is our responsibility to maintain these values in our ongoing relationships with clients, and in policy spaces. It is our responsibility to uphold these values in a larger arena and to support policies that do so, too. Maine is marked, on a national stage, by the inequities experienced by the Wabanaki peoples: the Maliseet, Mi'kmaq, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot, which have increased exponentially since the Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980. We stand out as a state in our refusal to grant these groups the same set of rights as the 570 other federally recognized tribes across the United States. Indeed, according to a study published by the Harvard Kennedy School in 2020, the constraints on Maine tribes imposed by the Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980 have had a markedly negative impact on the economic stability and well-being of Maine's native peoples. Between 1989 and 2020, the average per capita gross domestic product growth for tribal peoples in Maine was 9%, falling below the 11% national average and paling in comparison to the 61% growth for federally recognized tribes in other states.

After repeated attempts at finding a legislative vehicle for tribal sovereignty, this bill is the closest Maine has come to offering our native tribes the same rights and protections afforded to other federally recognized tribes across the country. For decades now, the Maine legislature has danced around the issue of sovereignty and come to various states of tension and agreement in efforts to improve the rights and access of the Wabanaki nations throughout the state. As the bill will allow Maine tribes to benefit from laws made after 1980 and future laws that apply to other federally recognized tribes, it is a first step towards setting Maine tribes on equal footing with those around the country. Particularly of note in the bill's language is the specific attention drawn to issues of tribal land use and environmental protection—which are the realms in the Indian Claims Settlement Act that have caused the greatest distress and economic damage to Maine's tribal communities in the decades since.



To acknowledge and repair the harm caused by the Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980, we must take this significant first step towards restoring full rights to the indigenous peoples of Maine. This is also a step in formally acknowledging the Wabanaki Peoples as thoughtful stewards of the lands now recognized as the state of Maine, long before settlers established a presence here.

LD2004 is an opportunity for Maine to right a decades-long error. It is a chance to honor the historic presence of the Wabanaki nations in this state and to reconsider the nature of our relationships to each other and to the land that we all call home.

Please vote ought to pass.

With thanks for your consideration,
Devon Stockmayer



United Way
of Southern Maine



