



Testimony before the Judiciary Committee

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

May 31, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen and Members of the Committee:

I am Rev. Jane Field, Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council has seven mainline Protestant member-denominations and two associate member congregations who together represent 437 local churches in Maine with 55,000 parishioners in their care. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in SUPPORT of LD 2004**.

As we have stated in previous testimony before this Committee, the Maine Council of Churches affirms our respect for and recognition of the inherent sovereignty of Maine's indigenous tribes and we are committed (1) to support their right to self-determination, self-governance, self-sufficiency, and cultural identity, (2) to address our own racism, and (3) to promote social justice. Toward those ends, we call on our legislature to strengthen our state's actions to honor our collective responsibility to the tribes to interact with them on a mutually respectful and appropriate government-to-government basis.

As you know, because of the 1980 Land Claims Settlement Act, the Wabanaki tribes in Maine are currently treated differently than the other 570 federally recognized tribes in the United States: unless they are explicitly written into a piece of federal legislation, they are excluded from any of the benefits it provides. This is an excessive burden. The Wabanaki tribes do not have the resources to track all federal legislation and lobby Congress to be included in each separate bill (and even if they *did* have the resources, they shouldn't have to waste them in such an absurd and unnecessary paper chase!).

One of the reasons the Wabanaki tribes *don't* have resources? Because, since passage of the 1980 Land Settlement Claims Act, 151 federal Indian laws have been passed from which they were excluded (Suffolk University report, 2019). Without access to the federal funds attached to those bills, the self-determination and economic vitality of the Wabanaki tribes have been stunted. Tribes in other states who did receive these funds have achieved over 60% growth in per capita income since 1980, while Wabanaki tribes saw only 9% growth in the same period ("Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine," Harvard Kennedy School, 2022). And the Wabanaki aren't the only people in Maine who have been harmed by these exclusions—those federal resources would have benefitted rural areas surrounding the tribes, too.

LD 2004 does not circumvent the 1980 Land Claims Settlement Act. It simply changes one provision so that we can begin the process of ensuring the tribes in Maine have the same opportunities for self-determination and economic growth as the other 570 federally recognized tribes already have, thus putting them and their rural neighbors on a path to prosperity.

Passage of LD 2004 is one step toward promoting harmony, reconciliation, and mutual understanding between our State and tribal communities. It is a step that is long overdue. For these reasons, the Maine Council of Churches supports LD 2004 and urges you to vote OUGHT TO PASS.

*Episcopal Diocese of Maine, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA),  
Religious Society of Friends, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church*

Jane Field  
Maine Council of Churches  
LD 2004

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