



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Support of:
LD 2004: An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations**

Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
State House, Room 438
Wednesday, May 31, 2023

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. MPHA is in support of LD 2004: "An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations."

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 700 individual members and 60 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

The Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) of 1980 established a different, more restrictive status for Wabanaki tribes than that of all other 570 federally-recognized tribes in the United States. MICSA dictates that when Congress passes legislation that impacts federally-recognized tribes, which includes the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, the Mi'kmaq Nation, the Passamaquoddy Tribes at Motahkomikuk and Sipayik, and the Penobscot Nation, each of these tribes must be explicitly named in the bill's text in order to receive any of the legislation's benefits. This incredible and unjust burden is unique to the Wabanaki Nations; all other federally-recognized tribes are, by default, included. Accordingly, MICSA has prevented Wabanaki Nations from benefiting from more than 150 federal laws, including for drinking water protection, health care access, economic development, and support of other public and community health endeavors.

Everyone deserves just and fair opportunities to obtain good health. Members of tribal communities have faced unjust and unfair conditions that influence health – including contaminated drinking water, food insecurity, cultural disrespect, unsafe housing, hampered economic development, and poverty. We believe this bill is a matter of fairness and justice. We respectfully request you to please vote LD 2004 "Ought to Pass." Thank you for your consideration.