

**To:** Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

**From:** Pema Lhundrup

**Date:** Monday, February 23, 2025

**RE:** Testimony in support of L.D. 14: “An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks”

Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry.

My name is Pema Lhundrup, and I am writing to strongly support L.D. 14: “An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks.” As an international college student who currently studies in Bar Harbour, Maine I will never know as much about this land, its water and air as those who have lived here for centuries and yet I have much easier access to these parks and their resources than many indigenous peoples who have lived here with their families for generations. This inequality is not a coincidence but a horrific truth that reflects the dispossession of the indigenous people from their lands and the systemic injustices they face.

This policy is not just a great equalizer, it is a necessary step toward honoring Indigenous sovereignty, cultural heritage, and environmental stewardship of the original people of the land. Some might say this is a form of reparation, I say it is a form of justice. For generations, Indigenous communities have maintained deep spiritual, cultural, and ecological connections to the lands that now make up our state parks. Restricting their access through systemic barriers like entrance fees places unfair financial hurdles for these indigenous communities who continue to face historical displacement and marginalization.

Today in a world where environmental degradation is evident indigenous-led conservation efforts have demonstrated the importance of traditional ecological knowledge in preserving biodiversity and maintaining healthy ecosystems. Allowing free access to state parks would facilitate opportunities for Indigenous stewardship, cultural practices, and intergenerational learning, all of which contribute to a more sustainable future for our shared environment.

This would not be an impulsive piece of legislation as it follows strong precedence set by several states, including Oregon and Minnesota. These are states that have recognized the indigenous right not as a special privilege but as a restoration of land access to a people who have a long ongoing relationship with the land. Maine, with its deep history of Wabanaki stewardship, should follow suit and reaffirm its commitment to Indigenous rights by passing this bill.

I urge the Committee to take this deeply meaningful step by ensuring free access to state parks for Indigenous peoples. Doing so is a recognition of historical truths, a commitment to justice, and a step toward a more inclusive and sustainable future for all.

In the words of Martin Luther King Jr, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”

Most sincerely,

Pema Lhundrup

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Bar Harbour  
LD 14

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