

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Lisa Montgomery. I am an enrolled member of the Penobscot Nation and grew up on Indian Island. I am a service-connected disabled veteran and a former member of the Penobscot Nation's Tribal Council. I am testifying today neither for or against LD 813 and want to share a few comments.

The Abenaki people are part of the Algonquian-speaking tribes of the Northeast, primarily in what is now Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, and southern Quebec. The Abenaki are generally divided into two main groups: Eastern Abenaki (who historically lived in Maine and parts of New Brunswick) and Western Abenaki (who historically lived in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Quebec).

Many Abenaki people today continue to live in their ancestral homelands and maintain cultural traditions despite historical displacement. This bill does not seek to duplicate or replace the federal recognition process which is granted by the U.S. federal government, usually through the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The BIA much like many tribal serving agencies has been chronically underfunded and the current administration has already cut staff with pending litigation likely.

This bill has the opportunity to provide state recognition in an unknown political climate centering the historical and cultural kinship of Indian people who have occupied the place now called Maine and taken care of environment for the good of all of humanity.

A formal process for acknowledging tribes the opportunity to access state-level benefits could allow for historical preservation and attention to the cultural contributions of tribal people that has been difficult to achieve with the past clashes between federal and state rights in regards to tribal nations.

When contextualizing this issue from an agrarian perspective I thought of farmers applying for organic certification. Many farmers here in Maine follow organic practices even if they don't apply, receive, and engage in the bureaucratic process of certification because the label itself is not what truly defines sustainable, chemical-free, or regenerative farming. Certification can be expensive and time-consuming, requiring strict documentation and compliance with regulations that many small or independent farmers may struggle to meet. Farmers can still grow food without synthetic chemicals, practice crop rotation, and maintain soil health without an official label but there will always be consumers who want the label. There are also those who value direct relationships with farmers and trust their growing methods over a certification, making the organic label useful but not always essential.

I akin the federal recognition process in the same lens. Not all tribal people need to engage in a colonized relationship based on blood quantum. Many have assimilated and lost a lot of their ancestors' ways. I ask that you consider a more decolonized way of approaching state recognition that has the opportunity to preserve the histories and cultural contributions of all Indian people.