

Betsy Williams
Brunswick
LD 395

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Betsy Williams, I live in Brunswick and I am writing in support of LD 395, to restore access to federal laws beneficial to our Wabanaki tribes.

The Settlement Act of 1980 has had a debilitating effect on the viability and agency of our native citizenry. Unlike the other 570 federally recognized tribes, Maine tribes have been unable to benefit from over 150 federal laws that have provided opportunities for economic development, access to health care, natural disaster relief, and job creation, to name a few. LD 395 would fix this inequity. Not only have the tribal members been denied the benefits, so have all other non-tribal citizens living in the economically depressed areas that have resulted from this loss of federal funding.

The 2022 study done by the Harvard Kennedy School found that “As a result [of Maine’s ability to block federal Indian policies] the development of the Wabanaki Nations’ economies and governmental capacities have been stunted. Today, all four of the tribes in Maine—Maliseet, Mi’kmaq, Passamaquoddy, and Penobscot—are stark economic underperformers relative to the other tribes in the Lower 48 states.”

Self-government is a cornerstone of our democracy and is enshrined as a right of all tribal governments (as one of three “sovereigns”) in the US Constitution. Please vote yes on LD 395 and bring needed economic support to our rural and tribal communities and put the Wabanaki on equal footing with all other federally recognized tribes. Thank you.