

To: Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Carl Costanzi, Ph.D.
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Re: Support for LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing, and LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

Intro: Sen. Carney, Rep. Harnett and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Carl Costanzi and I live in Norway. I am writing to testify in support of LD 785 and LD 395.

Testimony: As President of the Board of Directors of the Western Foothills Land Trust I've had the privilege of working with other conservation organizations across the state through the First Light Learning Journey to expand Wabanaki access and relationship to land for the prosperity and wellbeing of our tribal neighbors. We do this through listening, relationship and trust building and resource sharing.

One of the many things I've learned on this journey is the gross injustice of the 1980 Maine Land Claim Settlement Implementing Act. As a result of this Act Maine is the only state in the US that doesn't recognize and respect the inherent sovereignty of the federally recognized Wabanaki Nations. As a result they have limited abilities to govern themselves and determine their own future. With the Act the state of Maine, in essence, appointed themselves caretakers of a sovereign people. They have also not been able to benefit from many federal laws passed since 1980.

With colonization, the people who had lived and stewarded the land we now call Maine, whose culture has always been rooted in relationship to the land, were either killed or displaced, refugees in their own home. They now legally steward only 1.2% of their ancestral lands. The fact that we don't respect this historical relationship and don't recognize the inherent sovereignty of the tribal nations that were here long before white came and subjugated them to refugee status is unjust.

The Penobscot Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribes, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Mi'kmaq Nation are sovereign nations, and it's time for the State of Maine to recognize this fully. LD 785 is built on recommendations developed by consensus through an intertribal, Indigenous and non-native, and bipartisan legislative Task Force. LD 385 brings Wabanaki Nations into the same status as every other federally recognized Tribe in the US, ensuring they are included in future national legislation affecting tribes. Together, LD 785 and LD 385 take significant steps to remove barriers to Wabanaki self-governance and care for land and people, to the benefit of Wabanaki and non-native communities alike.

Closing: The Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act did a wonderful job in coming to consensus on correcting the 1980 Act, leading to LD 785 and LD 395. I strongly urge you for the benefit of the entire state to pass both Acts. Thanks you very much for your service, time and consideration.