

**Testimony in support of LD 785
to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary**

February 19, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Sarah Johnson and I am a resident of Sanford.

I am writing in support of LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act. The Wabanaki Nations should already be legally treated and protected as sovereign nations with the rights and powers all other federally recognized tribes have. This bill is an overdue step towards rectifying injustices done to the people of the Wabanaki Nations.

We have the report from the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act. It is clear on the vast benefits of implementing its recommendations. I question who we are if we do not pass this bill, as I thought Maine was a state of hard-working community-caring peoples who respect self-determination.

I can provide no better testimony than the [Maine Monitor](#) article in 2023 that cited the Harvard Study: [Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine](#).

“Maine is leaving more than \$300 million a year on the table and contributing to child poverty rates of up to 76.9 percent in tribal households by continuing to uphold the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980 (MICSA).

The consistent underdevelopment of the Wabanaki tribes in the state due to MICSA has risen to the level of UN human rights violations.

Unlike most of the 574 tribes in the US, Maine’s five tribes — the Maliseet, Micmac, Passamaquoddy at Sipayik, Passamaquoddy at Motahkomikuk, and Penobscot — have not prospered over the past three decades.

While other tribes saw incomes increase by 61 percent between 1989 to 2018, Maine tribes saw theirs increase by only 9 percent — or just about half than the average improvement in the US during that time.

Child poverty rates paint an equally grim picture. Children at Motahkomikuk experience poverty at a rate of 40.2 percent; at Sipayik, it's 58.3 percent. (Tribal households off of reservations also struggle; the Penobscot experience 45.7 percent, the Maliseet, 61.2 percent, and the Mi'kmaq, 76.9 percent). Maine as a whole is much lower at 15.1 percent.

In no uncertain terms, the Harvard study found that MICSA is solely responsible for the ongoing poverty on the reservations in the state. In addition to keeping tribal members in poverty, the study contended that MICSA's existence is suppressing the development of more than 2,700 jobs, most of which would be held by non-Natives and most of which would be located in Washington County, one of the poorest counties in the state.”¹

In no uncertain terms, I urge you to vote Ought To Pass on LD 785.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sarah Johnson

Sanford, Maine

<https://themainemonitor.org/wabanaki-sovereignty-would-benefit-all-maine-residents-study-finds/>

https://ash.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/wabanaki_report_vfin_for_dist_2022-12-09.pdf

¹ <https://themainemonitor.org/wabanaki-sovereignty-would-benefit-all-maine-residents-study-finds/>