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LD 395

I am writing to support passage of LD 395, which will put the Wabanaki Nations on equal footing with all other federally recognized tribes.

Currently, the Wabanaki Nations are the only federally recognized tribes that must be explicitly written into each federal law to benefit from it. LD 395 would modernize the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement Act so that the Wabanaki Nations can benefit from most existing and future federal laws that apply to the other 570 federally recognized tribes.

LD 395 will benefit the Wabanaki Nations and all residents of rural Maine. The 2022 analysis by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development concluded that removing the jurisdictional barriers would help the Wabanaki Nations take advantage of federal self-determination policies, programs, and funding that elsewhere in Indian Country have led to the creation of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services produced by Native businesses.

The bill would address 40 years of missed opportunities for Wabanaki people to benefit from laws such as the Stafford Act, the Violence Against Women Act, and the Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA). The current legislation prevented the Wabanaki Nations from receiving emergency funding during natural disasters, left Wabanaki women vulnerable to interpersonal violence, and left healthcare worker positions vacant resulting in less access to health care.

Wabanaki people deserve access to legal tools to protect the health of the environment and well being of their communities through laws such as The Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act. Despite being environmental stewards in Maine for generations, Wabanaki Nations have been blocked from accessing these laws through court battles, hampering their efforts to protect water quality, ensure clean drinking water, and to restore wildlife and marine habitats.