

February 17, 2026

**To:** Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
**From:** Dr. Richard B. Peterson  
93 Winding Way  
Portland, ME 04102  
**Re:** Support for LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

Dear Sen. Carney, Rep. Moonen, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Richard Peterson. I live in Portland and am writing in support of LD 395. I moved to Maine in 2002 to teach Environmental Studies at the University of New England. It was a good decision. I love Maine. I love teaching about Maine's environment in the classroom, but especially through going out with my students into Maine's numerous conservation areas and well managed landscapes. That such remain is not an accident. Maine's indigenous peoples have stewarded this land for more than 10,000 years. Maine's early settlers and visitors to Maine like Henry David Thoreau were able to learn from Wabanaki peoples how to live in right relationship to the land so that both they and the land could be sustained. This has long been and remains a Maine tradition and may not have been so without the example and model of land stewardship provided by Maine's first inhabitants.

It has only been in the past decade that I have learned about Maine's unique and exceptionally regressive policies regarding its native population. Some policies date back centuries, some are more recent, mostly notably the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA). It is hard to believe, yet alone understand, why Maine stands alone among the states in keeping its native peoples from being able to benefit from federally sanctioned programs and at least 571 federal laws that have benefited all 570 federally recognized tribes in the United States.

These laws include:

- **The Stafford Act**, which provides emergency funds for natural disasters and public health crises.
- **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)**, which permits tribes to arrest and prosecute non-tribal individuals who commit certain domestic violence crimes in tribal communities.
- **Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCIA)**. Permanently authorized in 2010, the IHCIA helps tribal governments recruit licensed medical professionals to work in tribal health centers – addressing the challenges tribes face recruiting health care workers in rural and isolated communities.
- **Environmental Protection Laws**. The Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act authorize tribes to assume primary regulatory authority for federal environmental programs on their lands.

It is time for us as a state to no longer be an anachronism and to join other states in abiding by federal laws aimed to guarantee tribes self-determination, sovereignty, and economic opportunities.

Furthermore, amending MICSA would benefit not only the Wabanaki Nations, but also rural Maine, according to [a 2022 analysis](#) by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. 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. Some worry that the bill would change existing gaming laws to the disadvantage of state-authorized casinos. It will not. The bill stipulates that the Wabanaki Nations will be subject to the same state gaming laws as other entities.

I am not alone in my support of this bill. The legislation is co-sponsored by Democratic, Republican, and Independent legislators, including leadership in both caucuses in both chambers. Further, the bill is very similar to legislation that passed the Maine House and Senate in 2023 with [broad bipartisan support](#) before it was vetoed by Gov. Janet Mills.

Thank you for listening to me and to numerous other people whose testimonies in support of LD 395 you no doubt have received. Acting together and in accordance with the principles of democracy we are calling upon you, our representatives in government, to do the right thing. Passing LD 395 will benefit all Mainers and show the world that we too care deeply about fairness and equity in our way of life and in our relations with those who were here long before us.

Sincerely,



Dr. Richard B. Peterson  
Professor Emeritus of Environmental Studies  
University of New England