

Testimony for the 132nd Session of the Maine Legislature

To the Joint Committee of Judiciary

Public Hearing: Thursday February 19, 2026

IN FAVOR of LD 395

An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

Chairpersons, Senator Anne Carney and Representative Amy Kuhn and Members of the Joint Judiciary Committee, my name is Suzanne Rudalevige and I live in Cape Elizabeth.

It is sad and disappointing that we must visit the subject of Tribal Rights in Maine yet again. We are all aware by now that the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement Act have over the last forty years prevented the Wabanaki tribes in Maine from benefiting from the 151 federal laws that have benefited the other 570 federally recognized tribes in the USA. I am aware that the Legislature has tried hard to undo this dispossession in previous Sessions. I fervently hope that this Session can tip the balance.

This is a long and complicated bill but the bottom line is a matter of fairness and dignity. The Harvard Study, with which you will be familiar, has shown that nationally the tribal incomes since 1989 have grown 61%, while the Wabanaki income grew a meager 9% (while Maine's income grew 25%) This discrepancy is largely due to the Wabanaki tribes being excluded from the benefits provided to other tribes outside Maine. Nationally, we have legislated more fairly, as we have become more aware of the wrongs of colonialism done to all the tribes in this country.

My argument does not rest on all the technicalities covered by the language of the bill... all of them important.... but on the moral and spiritual values that I have tried to live by as one of the Christian faith. The Settlement itself was made in times when the leadership of Maine was biased against the existence of the Wabanaki peoples and had no compunction in resorting to questionable behavior as to what the tribes were aware of regarding what was, or was not, included in the Settlement. The Federal government was on the verge of the term of President Reagan, who won against the incumbent President Carter. President Reagan had made his disinterest in tribal rights and welfare very clear. Thus the forced pace of a poor Settlement for the Wabanaki Tribes.

It is now time to make the right and moral decision of at least allowing the Wabanaki tribes the benefit of federal law. That would be a measure of fairness and would give our tribes the ability to control much more of their lives than is currently possible. Just looking at the economic disparity, we know we need to act more responsibly than we have in the past. The Christian faith teaches that we are called to treat all persons as humans and with dignity, regardless of whether we see them as "other". We are called to side with those who have

suffered injustice and to try and right the oppressive circumstances in which they find themselves.

Thank you.