

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

From: Jennifer Melville, 1 Cove Road, Freeport ME 04032

Re: Support for LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

Date: February 17, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee, please accept my testimony in full support of LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations. This long overdue legislation is essential to ensure that Wabanaki in Maine are treated fairly and are on equal footing with all other Tribes recognized by the United States.

Unlike the other 570 federally recognized Tribes in the nation, Maine's Tribes are unable to exercise their inherent and legal rights to self-govern. Provisions of the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) deprive the Wabanaki of many federal benefits and laws that pertain to all other federal Tribes. LD 395 would amend MICSA and ensure that all Maine Tribes have equal access to federal policies and laws.

For over 10,000 years, Wabanaki have skillfully cared for the land and waters we all call home. As a long-time land conservation professional, I see firsthand how Wabanaki land managers meld western science and Indigenous knowledge to foster healthy forests and rivers. Because of provisions in MICSA barring Wabanaki from benefiting from many federal laws, Wabanaki nations are unable to assume their rightful regulatory authority on Tribal lands under the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts. Despite their generations of sound environmental stewardship, Wabanaki Nations have been blocked from accessing these crucial laws, hampering their efforts to protect water quality, ensure clean drinking water, and restore wildlife and marine habitats.

I strongly urge you to ensure passage of LD 385. With successful enactment of this bill, all Maine people – as well as the Wabanaki - will benefit and Maine will be back on the road to justice and fairness. Thank you for accepting my testimony and for all your efforts on behalf of Maine's people.