



Maine Conservation Voters

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Testimony of Sarah Woodbury, Legislative Director, Maine Conservation Voters
In Support of LD 395

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

Before the Judiciary Committee

February 19, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Sarah Woodbury. I am the legislative director for Maine Conservation Voters. MCV is a statewide non-profit organization with 13,000 members and supporters building a just, thriving future for all by acting on the climate crisis, protecting the environment, and safeguarding our democracy. I am here to testify in support of LD 395, *“An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations”*.

This legislation addresses a longstanding inequity rooted in the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act and the Maine Implementing Act, both of which created a legal framework that has had deeply harmful consequences, leading to the the Wabanaki Nations in Maine being excluded from the benefit of more than 150 federal Indian laws passed since 1980 that apply to nearly every other federally recognized tribe in the United States. The Wabanaki Nations are sovereign governments. Yet because of the unique structure of the 1980 settlement acts, they have been denied access to federal laws that support tribal economic development, environmental protection, public health, child welfare, criminal justice, and self-governance. LD 395 puts the Wabanaki Nations on equal footing with the 570 other federally recognized tribes across the U.S.

Removing the jurisdictional barriers would allow the Wabanaki people to access federal policies, programs, and funding, which would have broad economic impacts not only on the Wabanaki people but also on rural communities across Maine. A 2022 report by Harvard has shown that, elsewhere in the U.S, when tribal nations are able to access the federal tribal benefits, it has led to thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars

in goods and services produced by Native businesses. This benefits not only the tribal communities but also the surrounding rural communities in which they live.

The Wabanaki people have been blocked from accessing programs under important federal laws such as the Violence Against Women Act and the Indian Healthcare Improvement Act. They have also been unable to access important environmental programs such as the Clean Water Act and the Clean Air Act, preventing efforts to protect water quality, ensure clean drinking water, and to restore wildlife and marine habitats. The Wabanaki people are the original environmental protectors of this land we now call Maine, and should be able to steward the land as they see fit.

For more than four decades, Maine has operated under an arrangement that isolates the Wabanaki Nations from the broader framework of federal Indian law. No other federally recognized tribes in the United States are subject to the same sweeping exclusion. This is not a matter of partisanship — it is a matter of fairness, economic common sense, and honoring tribal sovereignty.

MCV urges the committee to vote “ought to pass” on LD 395.