



Testimony in Support: LD 785

An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act

Todd Martin

Northeast Senior Program Manager
National Parks Conservation Association

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Todd Martin. I am a lifelong Mainer and live in Winslow. I serve as the Northeast Senior Program Manager for the National Parks Conservation Association. NPCA strongly supports LD 785 and urges the committee to vote to approve the bill and send it on to the House and Senate for further consideration.

The National Parks Conservation Association is a 501(c)(3) non-nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with more than 180 staff nationwide. Since 1919, NPCA has served as an independent voice advocating for our national parks and the critical landscapes and history they preserve. Every one of the 433 units of the National Park System are on land that once belonged to tribal nations. This includes Acadia National Park, the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument, Saint Croix Island International Historic Site, the Frances Perkins National Monument, and the Appalachian Trail here in Maine. These are historic and present-day Wabanaki homelands. NPCA is committed to working with tribal nations to co-manage and co-steward our national parks and support tribal partners advocating for their inherent right to self-govern.

On behalf of our 1.6 million members across the country, including more than 8,000 members here in Maine, we urge this committee to vote ought to pass on LD 785 to amend the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act.

The five federally recognized Wabanaki tribes including the Passamaquoddy tribes at Sipayik and Indian Township, the Penobscot Indian Nation, the Houlton Band of Maliseets, and the Mi'kmaq Nation, who reside in what we call Maine today, deserve to have the same legal rights as the 570 other federally recognized tribes around the country. Tragically, the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act has robbed the Wabanaki tribes of their inherent sovereignty and put the tribes at the mercy of the State of Maine. Rather than being treated as sovereign

nations with authority to set their own regulations on their tribal land, as they deserve, Wabanaki tribes are treated like municipalities, subject to state taxes, regulations, and laws that limit their self-determination.

We applaud the consensus recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act, many of which are contained in LD 785. Those twenty-two recommendations were released in 2019, more than six years ago. The legislature and Governor must act this session to rectify this travesty.

Furthermore, Wabanaki tribes are largely left out of federal laws intended to benefit Indian country due to the Settlement Act. A 2024 Harvard study found that since passage of the Settlement Act in 1980, Wabanaki Tribes have been excluded from 150 federal laws that could have improved health, education, and economic outcomes. As a result, the Wabanaki tribes suffer some of the worst poverty and health outcomes of any tribe in the nation. According to the report, since 1989 the average income growth for tribal citizens outside of Maine has been 61%, but only 9% for Wabanaki citizens in Maine. For comparison Maine's overall income growth for the same period was 25%.

We are leaving Wabanaki nations behind. Amending the Settlement Act would help the Wabanaki Nations take advantage of federal self-determination policies, programs and funding that has led to the creation of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services elsewhere in Indian country. We must act now.

The politicians who drafted the 1980 Settlement Act called it a "living document" that should not be set in stone. Sadly, it has not been amended for more than 40 years. The Settlement Act allows for the State of Maine, Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation to amend the law. It is time to modernize this broken deal.

Therefore, we urge the committee vote Ought to Pass on LD 785 to ensure the five Wabanaki tribes enjoy the same legal rights and sovereignty as the 570 other federally recognized tribes. It is the right thing to do, and we cannot delay any longer.



Todd Martin (he/him)
Northeast Senior Program Manager

National Parks Conservation Association
C: 646-799-1627 | tmartin@npca.org | npca.org