

To: Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

From: Aidan Sites, Leeds, 04263

Re: Support for LD 785, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Aidan Sites and I live in Leeds. I am writing to you today testify in support of LD 395.

This bill aims to take necessary and longoverdue steps forward in removing future the harms done by the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980. We cannot change the past, all we can do is change the present and build a brighter future, for all.

For more than 40 years, restrictions outlined in the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) have blocked the members of Wabanaki Nations from accessing all of the federal self-determination policies that helped 570 other tribes create thousands of jobs and generate hundreds of millions in economic activity. While tribal income outside of Maine grew 61% since 1989, Wabanaki income grew only 9% (compared to Maine's 25% overall). It's time to remove these barriers. Furthermore, it has been documented that indigenous Wabanaki children are bearing the brunt of these financial burdens and inequalities: Childhood poverty in Wabanaki communities ranges from 40% to 77%, compared to Maine's overall rate of 15%. Those that created MICSA in the first place, themselves referred to it as a "[living document](#)", which is meant to evolve and be updated as circumstances and available knowledge changed. After more than 40 years of harm and state exclusion of our Wabanaki neighbors, it is time to modernize and bring forth evolution of this presently broken document. Furthermore, modernizing MICSA is a win-win for Wabanaki tribal citizens and non-tribal Maine citizens alike. [Harvard researchers project](#) that tribal self-government would add \$330 million annually to Maine's GDP, create 2,700+ jobs (more than half filled by non-tribal rural Mainers), and generate \$39 million yearly in state and local tax revenue. When the Wabanaki thrive, rural Maine thrives.

Last – but most certainly not least – Wabanaki peoples are some of the brightest and biggest protectors of our state's rich and scenic biodiversity. I am a biologist, so I have seen firsthand the power ancestral wisdom can hold in trying to understand and ultimately protect the ecosystems that all of humanity needs to survive. 80% of biodiversity around the world is stewarded by local indigenous peoples, whereas indigenous peoples make up only about 2% of the global population.

When we protect and cultivate true community with local indigenous peoples – who, for those of us in what is now called Maine, are the Wabanaki peoples – we also protect the ecosystems and nonhuman life that also call this place home.

Non-tribal Mainers are overwhelmingly in support of Wabanaki sovereignty. More than 1,600 Mainers testified in record numbers supporting tribal sovereignty legislation based on the [consensus recommendations](#) of a bipartisan legislative task force. Over 250 businesses and organizations have joined the [Wabanaki Alliance Tribal Coalition](#) — including the newly formed “[Businesses for Wabanaki Sovereignty](#)”. I am writing to you today as a Mainer, asking you to stand with the thousands of Mainers, as we work to make up for some of the incredible harms done by the MICSA of 1980. It is time to stand on the right side of history.

Stand with Mainers, stand with your constituents, stand with the future of this beautiful place we are lucky to call home..... Stand with the Wabanaki. Support LD 785.

Thank you for reading, for your time, and for your commitment to doing what is best for *all* the people of Maine.

Aidan Sites
Leeds
LD 785

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