

Deborah Bicknell
Yarmouth
LD 395

Feb. 18th, 2026

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee, Thank you for your public service and for the opportunity to submit my testimony in favor of both LD 395 An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations and LD 785 An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act. Both LDs will allow Wabanaki Nations to operate with more self-governance and will provide more opportunity, benefiting both all members of tribal communities, and all of us in the State of Maine.

LD 395 has wide bi-partisan support, which gives me hope that some aspects of democracy and common sense are still alive and well. This LD as you know allows Wabanaki Nations to be granted the same rights as all other federally recognized tribes. Currently, the Wabanaki Nations are the only federally recognized tribes that must be explicitly written into each federal law to benefit from it, which has and does hinder federal money and opportunities for economic growth from coming to Maine. These are missed opportunities for all of us here in the State, and this law will allow healthy movement forward for Wabanaki Nations.

LD 785 would implement years of hard and thoughtful work by many to provide recommendations for changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA.) We can see direct impacts from this controversial act, especially on younger generations of Wabanaki citizens with poverty rates which are far and above those for young people in the State of Maine. When I think about the motto of Maine: Dirigo or "I lead" I can only think that now it is time for us to lead with our values of freedom and justice for all, and that in my opinion means the passing of this law to allow the updating of the MICSA. Those who drafted the act in the 1980s called it a "living document" and thus imagined that it would grow, shift and evolve. It is time now to remove unnecessary barriers to the health and vitality of Wabanaki Nations.

Together, LD 785 and LD 395 are meaningful steps to removing barriers to Wabanaki self-governance. In these unprecedented times, the need for self-governance is necessary and I for one am very grateful for the deep wisdom and stewardship of Wabanaki people and communities. These LDs are the right move in the right moment. I request the passing of both LD 395 and LD 785 for the health and well-being of our neighbors, friends and colleagues who are part of the Wabanaki Nations and for all of us.

Thank you for receiving this testimony.

Respectfully,

Deborah E. Bicknell