

**Testimony in Support of LD 785 “An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act”**

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Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is James Myall and I’m a policy analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I’m here today to testify in support of LD 785 “An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.” MECEP believes that recognition of Wabanaki sovereignty is a long-overdue moral imperative for Maine, and an economic development tool that will benefit all of us.

MECEP’s recent report, *Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine* lays out this moral and economic case.<sup>1</sup> We find that:

- Over the course of two centuries, Mainers benefited to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars in land sales, tax revenues, and the sale of natural resources like timber. None of that has gone back to Wabanaki Nations.
- Cumbersome state laws under the Settlement Acts and the need to get local and legislative approval have stymied Wabanaki efforts to purchase the 200,000 acres envisaged in the 1980 settlement.
- Tribal Nations with full recognition of their sovereignty have seen much higher rates of economic growth in both the United States and Canada. In the US, per-capita incomes on Indian reservations have grown more than six times faster than per-capita incomes in the Wabanaki Nations since 1989.<sup>2</sup> What’s more, evidence from Canada shows areas in which First Nations could exercise more autonomy saw faster income growth for non-indigenous as well as indigenous residents.<sup>3</sup>
- Across the United States, 344 federally recognized tribes operate more than 5,500 businesses in a variety of sectors. These tribal enterprises can employ hundreds of non-native people, attract investment and provide much-needed economic development to rural areas. While many people think of casinos or other gaming operations, there are plenty of examples of successful tribal enterprises in tourism, conservation and conscientious resource-management. These efforts build on thousands of years of indigenous knowledge and a deep sense of connection to the land.

- The Settlement Acts' restrictions on federal law cut the Wabanaki Nations and, by extension, their neighbors, off from millions of dollars of federal grant funding each year.

LD 785 should not be controversial. It corrects a historical injustice that should not have been allowed to persist for two hundred years. It is the result of the work of a bipartisan task force and has support from many of your fellow legislators. If any more reason were needed to support this bill, we hope MECEP's research confirms that when the Wabanaki thrive, all Mainers thrive.

I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 785, and I'm happy to take any questions.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> James Myall, "Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine." *Maine Center for Economic Policy*. Oct 14, 2025. <https://www.mecep.org/maines-economy/sovereignty-starts-here/>

<sup>2</sup> Kalt, Joseph P., Amy Besaw Medford & Jonathan B. Taylor, "Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine." The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. Dec 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Gillezeau, Rob. "Economic implications of reaffirming Indigenous land rights: Lessons from Canada." Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis. May 30, 2025. <https://www.minneapolisfed.org/article/2025/economic-implications-of-reaffirming-indigenous-land-rights-lessons-from-canada>