



# Friends of Casco Bay

## Casco BAYKEEPER

February 19, 2026

Senator Anne Carney  
Representative Amy Kuhn  
Committee on Judiciary  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333  
JUD@legislature.maine.gov

Re: Friends of Casco Bay 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 Act

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Esteemed Members of the Committee on Judiciary,

Friends of Casco Bay testifies in support of LD 785. We supported tribal sovereignty in 2021, and again in 2024. Since that time, the Wabanaki Alliance and this legislature have worked hard to refine legislation for this purpose. LD 785 encapsulates that hard work and has the support of the Wabanaki Alliance. It implements recommendations made by a bipartisan task force to restore tribal rights to regulate fishing, hunting, and management of lands and waters. Since we first supported tribal sovereignty, we have deepened our relationship with tribal members and have learned a lot about how they relate to and care for water and land. That knowledge will in turn help us fulfill our mission. We wholeheartedly support LD 785.

For over 35 years, Friends of Casco Bay has worked to improve and protect the health of Casco Bay and its watershed. We understand we are not the first nor only stewards of these waters. Long before European settlement, indigenous people lived here in harmony with nature. For example, the Abenaki called the Bay Aucocisco, or “the place of the herons.” They named Chebeague Island, which means “isle of many springs,” for its many freshwater springs, and Maquoit Bay, which means “bear place” or “bear bay,” for the bears drawn to its shores by former runs of Atlantic Salmon. On some of Casco Bay’s islands, you can find spear and harpoon points, fish bones, and shell heaps indicative of indigenous peoples’ late winter, spring, and summer camps. The Abenaki word for the Presumpscot River means “many falls” or “many rough places.” In the mid-1700s, Abenaki Chief Polin advocated for fish passage as European settlers began damming the river for power.

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As recently as the 1970s, Wabanaki tribes held legal claim to more than one million acres of land “owned” by private landowners and the State of Maine. To avoid hostilities and legal disputes, the federal government brokered a settlement between the State of Maine and the tribes – the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980. This act was intended to provide funding and facilitate a process for the tribes to replace the land unjustly taken from them. Due to many factors, the tribes have not been able to purchase the amount of the land that was intended by the Act. Moreover, the State of Maine and tribes have different interpretations of the Act, which has led to costly, legal conflicts.

A bipartisan task force sought to cure this by recommending changes to Maine law to recognize the sovereignty of Wabanaki tribes. There are many reasons Maine should recognize the sovereignty of the Wabanaki people, but principally because this right is inherent and its recognition represents one step toward healing the centuries of harm European settlers and the State of Maine have inflicted upon the tribes. Included in the recommendations are the tribes’ rights to regulate hunting, fishing, and water and land use on tribal lands. As environmental degradation in Maine persists and the impacts of climate change continue to mount, restoring the Wabanaki tribes’ ability to manage tribal lands, water, and wildlife is not only just, but will improve and protect nature for generations to come.

We are so grateful for tribal efforts to work in harmony with us to cherish and steward our waters. We have read LD 785, which takes a thoughtful approach to acknowledging and restoring tribal self-determination. We respectfully request you vote that LD 785 Ought To Pass. As the Passamaquoddy Language Keeper, Dwayne Tomah, graciously says: “We are all in this together.” Let’s honor that.

Sincerely,



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