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**Testimony of Joe Oliva, Outreach and Communications Director of
GrowSmart Maine in support of LD 395, An Act To Restore Access To
Federal Laws Beneficial To The Wabanaki Nations**

February 19, 2025

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

My name is Joe Oliva and I am the Outreach and Communications Director of GrowSmart Maine. We are a statewide non-partisan non-profit organization helping communities navigate change in alignment with smart growth. We advocate for comprehensive policies and funding for smart growth practices and outcomes.

Equity is integral to smart growth, in which the overarching vision is that people feel safe, that they belong, and that they can thrive in their communities. To that end, LD 395 puts the Wabanaki Nations on equal footing with 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. LD 395 would modernize the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement Act so that the Wabanaki Nations can benefit from most existing and future federal laws that apply to the other 570 federally recognized tribes. The legislation also extends to the Mi'kmaq Nation – which did not participate in MICSA – the same rights granted to the Penobscot Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians.

Already, the Wabanaki nations have been excluded from at least [151 federal laws](#) over the past 40 years including The Stafford Act, Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), Indian Health Care Improvement Act (IHCA), and environmental protection laws. Passage of LD 395 would ensure that current and future members of the Wabanaki Nations enjoy the protections and opportunities that those laws provide.

According to [a 2022 analysis](#) by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Amending the two acts would benefit not only the Wabanaki Nations, but also rural Maine. Removing the jurisdictional barriers would help the Wabanaki Nations take advantage of federal self-determination policies, programs,

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and funding that elsewhere in Indian Country have led to the creation of thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars in goods and services produced by Native businesses.

We encourage the committee to pass this bill, and GrowSmart Maine is willing to assist the committee in any way that is helpful.