



Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

Kennebunkport Conservation Trust (KCT) strongly supports **LD 785, An Act to Advance Self-determination for Wabanaki Nations** and **LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations**.

KCT is convinced that when Wabanaki homelands are returned to their people, the entire landscape benefits; numerous studies around the world highlight the positive correlation between Indigenous land management and the preservation of both healthy forest ecosystems and biodiversity. As a participating organization in First Light we are also aware that land return without full sovereignty is incomplete. The full recognition of Wabanaki sovereignty is critical to the continuance of longstanding Wabanaki decision-making and land care traditions that improve the wellbeing of people, lands, and waters.

However, there remain significant state barriers to Wabanaki sovereignty. Due to the 1980 Settlement Act, Wabanaki Tribal governments are made to operate as quasi-municipalities when it comes to acquiring new trust lands, tending to existing Tribal lands, and furthering economic development. The Settlement Act imposed a barrier on full expression of Wabanaki sovereignty that hinders projects, resources and programs that would otherwise benefit land, water, and people. Furthermore, the Settlement Act added a barrier to Wabanaki inclusion in federal legislation, blocking Wabanaki access to federal policy and funding that might otherwise support land care and communities. Wabanaki Nations are alone amongst US federally-recognized Tribes in having to navigate this additional layer of state control.

The Penobscot Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribes, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians and Mi'kmaq Nation are sovereign nations and it is time for the State of Maine to recognize this fully. LD 785 is built on recommendations developed by consensus through an intertribal, Indigenous and non-native, and bipartisan legislative Task Force. LD 385 brings Wabanaki Nations into the same status as every other federally-recognized Tribe in the US, ensuring they are included in future national legislation affecting tribes. Together, LD 785 and LD 385 take significant steps to remove barriers to Wabanaki self-governance and care for land and people, to the benefit of Wabanaki and non-native communities alike.

We endorse LD 785 and LD 395 and offer the Judiciary Committee our strongest encouragement to pass these bills.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Tom Carney', written in a cursive style.