



Richard A. Bennett  
Senator, District 18

THE MAINE SENATE  
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333

**Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary on  
LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task  
Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing  
Act**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine. I am proud to cosponsor LD 785, “An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.”

In 1980, Maine and the Wabanaki Nations created the Settlement Act as a “dynamic, living agreement” that was meant to reflect the relationship between the tribes and the State. After 45 years of living under this unique agreement, the outcomes of this arrangement speak for themselves:

- Tribal incomes in the rest of the United States have grown by 61% since 1989; Wabanaki incomes have only grown by 9%. Even when accounting for gaming revenues, economic development in Wabanaki communities has lagged far behind.
- The childhood poverty rate across our state stands at 15%; the childhood poverty rate in Wabanaki communities ranges from 40 to 70%. Over half of children in some Wabanaki communities are living in poverty. That is outrageous.
- Because the Settlement Agreement requires federal laws to explicitly name the Wabanaki Nations to be applicable, Wabanaki communities have missed out on benefits every other federally recognized tribe has received. They must use state disaster relief funds rather than appealing directly to FEMA, lost access to domestic violence prevention funding, and – in one case – needed state approval just to use a well for safe drinking water.

These examples just scratch the surface of the problems with the current Settlement Act. It is time for us to update this agreement.

LD 785 would implement the remaining recommendations of the bipartisan Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act. These recommendations were the product of extensive research and careful drafting. They restore a productive government-to-government relationship between Maine and the Wabanaki Nations. They give the Wabanaki Nations the dignity and sovereignty they deserve. And they will help unlock economic growth for tribal communities and their neighboring rural municipalities.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to support LD 785. Thank you.