

Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Mak Thompson, and I am a citizen of Mi'kmaq Nation. I am here to testify in support of LD 395.

I have learned that it is important not to dwell on what I have missed out on but to dream of what is possible. As Wabanaki people, we live with the weight of the immeasurable traumas, but we prioritize dreaming of a future where we no longer have these worries and concerns. We look to the future, to do what we can to preserve and protect our environment, cultures, languages and people. Self-governance and respected sovereignty from the state can open opportunities for stronger relationships among the Nations and the State.

The things we are discussing here are not new, the technical concerns have been addressed and written out for you. I am asking you today to understand the burden that further inaction has on our Wabanaki Nations and to recognize the work that has been done to get where we are today. From the tireless work of those who have been fighting long before me to protect our sovereignty. We have come so far, as I stand here as a two-spirit Mi'kmaq citizen, here in the state house that was built to silence my people. As we adapt, we must acknowledge the exclusion of Mi'kmaq Nation in previous legislation. Though federal recognition was granted just before my lifetime, there continues to be exclusion as the Settlement Act has been neglected to be updated as a living document.

I often hear the question asked, what would it be like if these bills were already passed, if our nation's sovereignty was respected by the state. I would like to hope there is a lifetime where we do not have to waste our time asking these questions. As our communities are already doing the admirable work to support one another, preserve our culture and protect our lands. Today, with your support on LD 395, we move closer to a future where our elders can lift the weight from their shoulders to preserve our culture and pass this on to our next generations. A future where our next generations can prioritize the joy of community.

