



# SUIT UP MAINE

February 19, 2026

Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Kelli Whitlock Burton and I am a resident of Waldoboro and co-leader of Suit Up Maine, an independent, all-volunteer constituent action group representing thousands of Mainers in all 16 counties. I offer this testimony in support of LD 395, “An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations.”

For more than 40 years, the four federally recognized tribes in Maine, collectively known as the Wabanaki Nations, have received unequal benefit from the very federal laws created to address their needs. The Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, Mi'kmaq Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation are the only federally recognized tribes in the United States that are intentionally excluded from almost all funds and authority granted by Congress under Indian law.

The exclusion of the Wabanaki tribes stems from the 1980 *Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act* (MICSA) and its corresponding federal legislation, known as the Settlement Acts. The settlement not only stripped the Wabanaki of their sovereign claims and reduced their standing to that of municipalities, its restrictive language also blocked virtually all federal laws – past, present, and future – from applying to tribes in Maine if the federal law affects the application of state law. No other federally recognized tribes are excluded in this way.

LD 395 would help correct this injustice by amending the Settlement Acts, ensuring that tribes in Maine benefit from existing and future federal laws intended to benefit all federally recognized tribes. Suit Up Maine strongly supports the passage of this bipartisan bill.

Since enactment of the Settlement Acts,, Wabanaki tribes have lost out on the benefits of more than [150 federal laws](#) designed to create economic opportunities, improve public health, build resilience, and enjoy clean air and water.

Some of the vital laws the Wabanaki have been excluded from include the ***Violence Against Women Act***, which allows tribes to prosecute non-Indian defendants for domestic violence crimes against tribal members; the ***Indian Health Care Improvement Act***, which allows tribes to hire critically-needed medical professionals from other states; the ***Stafford Act***, which allows tribes to directly seek disaster relief and emergency assistance, and the ***Clean Air Act*** and ***Clean Water Act***, which authorize tribes to assume primary regulatory authority for administering federal environmental programs on tribal lands.

These exclusions don't just represent lost funding. They represent lost economic opportunities, lost opportunities to address the deadly opioid epidemic, lost opportunities to provide justice for victims of violent crimes, and lost opportunities to provide clean drinking water to vulnerable

children. Perhaps most harmful of all, they represent decades of lost opportunities to build trust and partnership with the Wabanaki tribes.

LD 395 would enable the Wabanaki Nations to take advantage of federal programs 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. In Maine, when the Wabanaki thrive, we all thrive. This legislation benefits us all.

Support for LD 395 comes from every county in Maine, from people of all political parties, from rural and urban communities, from elected officials in local, state, and national government, and from the more than 300 nonprofit, faith-based, and racial and social justice organizations like Suit Up Maine that are working in partnership with tribal leaders and citizens through the Wabanaki Alliance Coalition. Together, we understand that restoring fairness, dignity, and respect to state-tribal relations is not just the right thing to do for the Wabanaki. It's the right thing to do for all who live in the Wabanaki homelands now known as Maine. We urge you to stand with the majority of Maine people and our Wabanaki neighbors and vote Ought to Pass on LD 395.

Sincerely,

Karin Leuthy  
Founder & Co-Leader  
Camden, ME

Kelli Whitlock Burton  
Co-Leader  
Waldoboro, ME