

To: Committee on Judiciary

From: Will Lehan, 85 Mildred Ave, Bangor, ME, 04401

Date: February 19th, 2026

RE: Testimony in support of L.D. 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 members of the Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Will Lehan. I am an Education Technician at Orono High School, and I live in Bangor.

I am testifying in support of L.D. 785, “An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act,” because I believe in the many shared benefits that come from improving the state’s relationship with Wabanaki Nations.

The 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) has remained unamended for nearly twice as long as I have been alive. Though its authors described it as a “living document,” it has gone decades without meaningful changes to support tribal self-governance.

The results of MICSA staying unamended are measurable. Since 1989, Wabanaki Nations have experienced 9% income growth rates, whereas the state of Maine has seen 25% growth. Over this same period, tribal nations outside of Maine experienced a 61% increase in income. Additionally, childhood poverty rates in Wabanaki communities range from 40-77% compared to Maine’s statewide rate of 15%. All four Wabanaki Nations have experienced dramatic economic underperformance.

These statistics, taken from a 2022 Harvard University research report, not only illustrate the extent to which Wabanaki Nations have been held back by MICSA, but also the tremendous opportunities for growth in Wabanaki communities if barriers are removed.

That same report projected that recognizing greater tribal self-governance in Maine would create more than 2,700 jobs for both Wabanaki and non-Wabanaki Mainers, and generate nearly \$40 million in tax revenue.

There is a clear path toward improved living conditions, increased tax revenue, and stronger

sovereignty. Many of these opportunities were also identified by the 2020 Task Force on Changes to MISCA.

Some elected officials have expressed concern that amending MISCA could create conflict or confusion. However, it is the status quo that has produced decades of frustration, costly litigation, and economic stagnation.

Now is the time to recognize the Wabanaki Nations' right to meaningful self-governance and to pursue solutions that benefit everyone.

All of Maine thrives when the Wabanaki Nations thrive.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage you to support L.D. 785. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Will Lehan

William Lehan
Bangor
LD 785

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