



Testimony of Kristen Kinchla, Maine Children's Alliance
In support of LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the
Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing
Act, and LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the
Wabanaki Nations

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, I am Kristen Kinchla, Research Associate at the Maine Children's Alliance, a statewide, non-partisan advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of Maine children, youth, and families.

I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Children's Alliance in support of LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations, and LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.

At the Maine Children's Alliance, we focus on one core question: What policies help children and families thrive?

This legislation is about ensuring that Wabanaki children grow up in communities with the same tools for success that exist in tribal communities across the rest of the country. For more than 40 years, the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act has uniquely limited the ability of the Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Nation, Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, and Mi'kmaq Nation to benefit from federal laws that apply to the other 570 federally recognized tribes nationwide. As a result, Wabanaki Nations have been blocked from accessing more than 150 federal laws designed to support economic development, health care access, environmental protection, and public safety.

From a children's perspective, the consequences are measurable across health, housing, and economic security, showing persistent disparities. These outcomes

are not coincidental. They reflect structural barriers that have limited tribal self-governance and economic opportunity.

This is not only a tribal issue. It is a rural economic development issue. It is a workforce issue. It is a children's issue. When parents have stable employment, children are more likely to be healthy, succeed in school, and remain in their communities.

This bill does not create special treatment. It simply places the Wabanaki Nations on equal footing with every other federally recognized tribe in the United States. The original Settlement Act was described as a "living document." After four decades of litigation, uncertainty, and missed opportunity, modernization is both reasonable and overdue.

If Maine is serious about reducing child poverty, strengthening rural economies, and building healthier communities, then restoring tribal self-governance is a practical, necessary step forward.

Wabanaki children deserve the same opportunities afforded to tribal children elsewhere in this country.

When Wabanaki Nations thrive, Maine thrives.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to pass LD 395 and LD 785.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to Maine's children and families.

Kristen Kinchla, Maine Children's Alliance

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