

Johnna Ossie  
Portland  
LD 785

For over 40 years, the State of Maine has used the 1980 Indian Claims Settlement Act to deny the Wabanaki Nations the basic right of self-governance afforded to the 570 other federally recognized tribes nationwide. The passage of LD 785: An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act is a morally urgent issue. Childhood poverty rates in Wabanaki communities range from 40% - 77%, alarmingly higher than the state average of 15%. As a Maine resident, an early childhood educator, a social work graduate student, and a human being, I find this statistic deeply troubling.

Maine has a long, painful history of harming Wabanaki families. For generations, the state systematically took children from their homes through a child “welfare” system that continued to target Indigenous children at rates that far outpaced almost any other state, long after the Indian Child Welfare Act was passed.

We cannot move towards reconciliation for Wabanaki families within a framework that suppresses the economic and sovereign tools Wabanaki parents need to provide for their children. LD 785 allows Wabanaki tribes to access federal education, health, and infrastructure programs, which are currently denied to them.

I urge the Maine legislature to pass this vital piece of legislation to ensure that the next generation of Wabanaki children have the opportunities for prosperity and self-governance that are their birthright.