



February 19, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We are here 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 thank Senator Talbot Ross for sponsoring this important bill. We also offer our thanks to the Wabanaki people of this region - the people of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs, the Houlton Band of Maliseets, the Passamaquoddy Tribes at Motahkokmikuk and Sipayuk, and the Penobscot Nation. We thank them for their care and commitment, and for the Wabanaki Alliance for organizing the voices and experiences before the committee today.

For 40 years, restrictions in the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA) have blocked the Wabanaki Nations from accessing all of the federal self-determination policies that helped 570 other tribes create thousands of jobs and generate hundreds of millions in economic activity. While tribal income outside of Maine grew 61% since 1989, Wabanaki income grew only 9% (compared to Maine's 25% overall).¹ As a result of the Settlement Act's failures, childhood poverty in Wabanaki communities ranges from 40% to 77%, compared to Maine's overall rate of 15%. **It's time to remove these barriers.**

LD 785 levels the playing field for Wabanaki Nations, correcting a structural inequity that has long undermined the autonomy, safety, and well-being of Indigenous women and families in Maine. For more than forty years, the Wabanaki Nations have been subjected to a legal framework that denies them the self-determination afforded to other federally recognized tribes. That denial has clear consequences for health, safety, and justice. Restoring tribal authority over land, natural resources, civil regulation, and community institutions is essential for addressing gender-based violence, protecting

¹Harvard Ash Center

<https://ash.harvard.edu/resources/economic-and-social-impacts-of-restrictions-on-the-applicability-of-federal-indian-policies-to-the-wabanaki-nations-in-maine/>

environmental health, and supporting culturally grounded systems of care — all of which disproportionately affect women and families.²

At the heart of our work for gender equity and feminist public policy advocacy is the notion of self-determination and the dignity of bodily autonomy as a human right. We could not continue to work for these principles without supporting the same rights and recognition for the original stewards of these lands. We stand with the Wabanaki people in this work.

We hope you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 785. Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Destie Hohman Sprague

Maine Women's Lobby

²National Indigenous Women's Resource Center
<https://www.niwrc.org/restoration-magazine/february-2023/restoration-native-sovereignty-and-safety-native-women>