



Maine Equal Justice

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**MEJ Testimony 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**

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Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Dina Malual (she/her) and I am a Policy Advocate with Maine Equal Justice (MEJ), a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. We are pleased to testify in support of LD 785.

Maine Equal Justice (MEJ) strongly supports the opportunity to correct historically exclusive laws that prohibit the Wabanaki Nations (Passamaquoddy Tribe, Penobscot Nation, Mi'kmaq nation and Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians) the right to self govern, a right that is extended to other federally recognized tribes all over the United States.

LD 785 addresses the harms of the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act by implementing some of the recommendations reached by a bipartisan task force in 2020 that was formed to review the law's effectiveness.<sup>1</sup> The 22 consensus recommendations cover trust land acquisition, tribal court jurisdiction, hunting, fishing and natural resource regulation on tribal land and taxation authority. If passed, we will move closer to fully rectifying an historical wrong and move closer to true self-determination for the Wabanaki Tribal Nations.

Since the 1980s, Wabanaki people have been unjustly excluded from federal laws extended to over 150 federally recognized tribes. Today, those effects are still present, as Wabanaki Nations in Maine have yet to buy back the full amount of land promised in the settlement. Additionally, settlement terms limited sovereignty rights, and instead classified Wabanaki Nations as municipalities, essentially downgrading their right to self-govern.<sup>2</sup>

No matter the intentions of The Settlement Act, we know now that it was inequitable and stripped the Wabanaki people of their right to self-determination. With LD 785, we have the opportunity to correct that wrong and move another step closer to justice and equity for the Wabanaki people.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/3815>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.wabanakialliance.com/sovereignty/>

Lawmakers have the opportunity to further collaborate with the Wabanaki people to continue making significant strides that benefit the Tribal Nations in Maine. Maine Equal Justice is deeply committed to correcting Maine's history of unfair treatment of the Wabanaki Nations and looks forward to continued efforts to equitably include the Wabanaki Nations in our laws. Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you today. We urge the committee to vote in support of LD 785 to bring us closer to self-governance for the Wabanaki people.