

February 19, 2026

Good morning, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Bella Sturtevant, I'm a Political Psychology student at Thomas College and a resident of Leeds. I'm also a member of the Wabanaki Youth Policy Initiative with the Wabanaki Alliance and Maine Environmental Education Association. I am also a Rural Youth Organizer with JustME for JustUS (a youth-led climate justice rural youth focused nonprofit). I'm writing in strong support of the bipartisan bill LD 785: An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.

LD 785 will remove outdated barriers that have prevented the Wabanaki Nations from fully accessing federal self-determination policies available to all other tribes nationwide. For over 40 years, these restrictions have stifled economic growth in Wabanaki communities; tribal income outside Maine rose 61% since 1989, while Wabanaki income grew just 9%, compared to Maine's 25% overall, leading to lost opportunities for jobs and development that would benefit rural Maine.

As someone who has studied political theory and public policy, I see LD 785 as a step toward equity and sovereignty that strengthens Maine's economy and heals historical inequities, building collaboration rather than conflict.

I respectfully urge the committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 395. Thank you for your time and for your consideration of this important legislation.