

Stephen Watd
Newcastle
LD 785

Testimony of Stephen Ward, Newcastle Maine in favor of
LD 785, "An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on
Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement."

Submitted for the Public Hearing Before the Maine Legislature's Joint Standing
Committee on February 19, 2026

Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,
my name is Stephen Ward, and I serve as Treasurer of the Council on Indigenous
Relations of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to offer
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. The Council on
Indigenous Relations, Episcopal Diocese of Maine, was formerly known as the
Committee on Indian Relations and was created by Diocesan Resolution in 1991. I
offer this testimony as a private citizen on my own behalf and as a resident of
Newcastle.

I am testifying today in favor of LD 785, legislation which was held over from the
first Session of the 132nd Legislature and entitled "An Act to Enact the Remaining
Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims
Settlement." Several of the Task Force's recommendations have been independently
addressed and enacted. The remaining recommendations comprise LD 785. Taken
together in its multiple sections, LD 785 acknowledges the sovereignty of the four
federally recognized tribes in Maine and enables them to "enjoy the rights, privileges,
powers, duties and immunities" that other federally recognized tribes enjoy (Sections
1, 2)." It renders the tribes immune from suits in State court to the same extent as
other federally recognized tribes (Section 18) and grants to the tribes "exclusive
jurisdiction over fishing, hunting, trapping and other taking of wildlife..." within
tribal territory (Section 23). It grants "authority to the tribes to regulate water
resources" within tribal territory (Section 38) and establishes "exclusive authority for
tribal law enforcement" on tribal territories and Trust Lands (Section 52).

I strongly supports these and the other provisions in LD 785 based on the conviction
that simple justice compels this result. The Passamaquoddies, Mi'kmaq, Maliseet and
Penobscot Nations have resided in what has been known as Maine since time
immemorial, for 10,000 years or more. They were the original settlers of what now is
Maine and their sovereign status was never questioned until well into the 18th century
when European settlers undertook a lawless land grab of tribal lands.

Maine's four federally recognized tribes are the only tribes in the nation whose
autonomy and self-government are not honored by their host state. As a result,
Maine's four tribes have been denied access to 151 Congressional enactments since
1980 that provided substantial benefits to all other federally recognized tribes residing
in the United States.

For these reasons I urge an "Ought to Pass" vote on LD 785.

Respectfully submitted.
Stephen Ward, Newcastle