

Brendan Schauffler
Norway
LD 395

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee, My name is Brendan Schauffler and I am a public health professional living in Norway. While I grew up in Maine and have lived most of my life here, I am also an enrolled member of the Bay Mills Indian Community, an Ojibwe tribe of Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The Ojibwe, originally hailing from northern New England and the Canadian Maritimes, are cousins to the Wabanaki.

I believe that everyone deserves a fair shake at enjoying good health. Our tribal citizens in Maine have had less than a fair shake. Wabanaki communities have been subjected to unjust and unfair conditions that make it more difficult to experience good health and the quality of life that we pride ourselves on in Maine. These communities have struggled with unsafe drinking water, food insecurity, bigotry, unsafe housing, higher rates of incarceration, and poverty. These challenges are made even more difficult by other social drivers of health, like high rates of unemployment and limited access to quality and affordable health care.

LD 395 restores the recognition of Wabanaki self-determination and ensures equal access to federal benefits that are already available to other federally-recognized tribes in the U.S. Those benefits have helped improve the likelihood, in other tribal communities, that people can enjoy good health. Good health is a struggle in most tribal communities. We make that struggle harder for our tribal communities in Maine by denying access to federal benefits. It is time to change that and give Wabanaki people a fairer shake which is long overdue.

Thank you for your consideration. I hope you will support LD 395.