



Testimony before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
**An Act to Implement the Recommendations of  
The Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act**  
May 4, 2021

Senator Carney, Representative Harnett and Members of the Committee:

My name is Rev. Jane Field and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches. The Council has seven member-denominations who represent 437 local churches with 55,000 parishioners across the state. I am testifying on behalf of the Council **in support of LD 1626.**

The Maine Council of Churches affirms the sovereignty of the indigenous tribes whose land is now called Maine. We support their right to self-determination, self-governance, self-sufficiency and cultural identity, and acknowledge that certain decisions made in the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act deprived them of their inherent right to sovereignty—a right other tribes in the United States currently have.

We call on the people of Maine and the legislators who represent them to recognize that tribal sovereignty is a historical fact and must not be disregarded in favor of political expediency or for any other reason. Recognition of tribal sovereignty will help to preserve the tribes' culture, land, religious expression, and sacred spaces and to ensure the survival of Maine's Native People.

We believe that placing any conditions or restrictions on such recognition would, by definition, negate the very meaning of "sovereignty," and furthermore, would perpetuate the colonial mindset of white privilege that feels entitled to control, define or limit tribal sovereignty—a mindset that has, from the very first encounters between European colonizers and Maine's tribes, perpetrated violence and injustice against the indigenous people whose home this was for millennia before that first contact, leaving a legacy of economic, social, and cultural marginalization and destruction.

Historic treaties, the U.S. Constitution, federal legislation, and numerous court decisions recognize and define tribal sovereignty. Tribal nations within United States borders, *except for those in Maine*, have a unique legal and political relationship with the federal government. This relationship has been recognized and reinforced by the United States Constitution, nation-to-nation treaties, federal statutes, case law, executive orders, and other administrative policies. Just as the United States deals with states as governments, it also deals with indigenous tribes as governments, not as special interest groups, racial minorities, individuals, or other non-governmental entities. It is time that the State of Maine finally acknowledge the sovereignty of the tribal nations here and remove those impediments preventing them from exercising the rights and responsibilities to which they are entitled and from which they have unjustly been barred.

The Maine Council of Churches hereby reaffirms our respect for the inherent sovereignty of Maine's indigenous tribes and reaffirms our commitments: (1) to support their self-determination, (2) to address our own racism, and (3) to promote social justice. Toward those ends, we call on our legislature to recognize tribal sovereignty and thereby strengthen our state's actions to honor our responsibility to the tribes to interact with them on a mutually respectful and appropriate government-to-government basis. It is the necessary first step toward promoting harmony, reconciliation and mutual understanding within and among our communities. It is a step that is long overdue.