



**Testimony of the**  
**Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations**  
***In Support of***  
**LD 2004, “An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the**  
**Wabanaki Nations”**

Wednesday, May 31, 2023

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary My name is Morgan Pottle Urquhart, I live in Bangor, and I am the Policy and Communications Director of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations I am honored to offer testimony in support of LD 2004, “An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations ” We extend deep gratitude to Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross for her work on this bill and other tribal issues, as well as our Co-Chair, Ambassador Maulian Dana (Penobscot Nation), and Commissioner Vice Chief Richard Silliboy (Mi'kmaq Nation) for their steady, unfaltering leadership on issues of equity and justice spanning the entirety of the Dawnland And to the Wabanaki Confederacy Tribal citizens and Indigenous people across this land, who have lived on and cared for this land since time immemorial we thank you and stand with you, today and onward

The Permanent Commission was established in 2019 as an independent entity with a mission to examine racial disparities across all systems and to specifically work at improving the status and outcomes for historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations in the state The Permanent Commission is empowered by statute to advise and consult with all three branches of state government, as well as submit legislation Occupying a unique position in state government, the Permanent Commission represents a broad cross section of people most impacted by racial harm and colonization who have been excluded from policy making throughout Maine’s history

Maine people know that our communities thrive when we have the ability to choose the best path for ourselves The Wabanaki tribes, the first people to call this land home, know this, too For thousands of years before Europeans colonized and settled here, they were responsible stewards of these lands and waters, and capable, just leaders of their communities The Wabanaki remain strong stewards and leaders They persist, even in the face of present-day and generational harms, injustices, and deep disparities that are exacerbated by a lack of access to federal resources

This legislation would make key changes to a deal that hasn’t worked for anyone The Land Claims Settlement Act of 1980 was supposed to focus on resolving the valid land claims of the

tribes, but instead turned into an effort by the state to severely restrict the inherent sovereign rights of the Wabanaki Nations in order to prevent a “nation within a nation.” State leaders at the time thought that recognizing the full political existence of our tribal nations would somehow diminish us as a state. Whatever the cause for those feelings in 1980, they simply have not turned out to be true here in Maine or in other states. Instead, state governments that have embraced their tribal nations and developed productive and meaningful political relationships with them have seen those relationships bring progress to the entire state. We believe this legislation represents a critical step toward recognizing the rights of Wabanaki tribal nations –to begin to heal old wounds so that all of us can grow and thrive together.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony and bill. We respectfully urge you to support LD 2004. I am happy to answer any questions or provide additional information if desired.