



Natural Resources Council of Maine

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Testimony in Support of LD 14, An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks

Before the Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry

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Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee, my name is Luke Frankel, and I am the Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director and Staff Scientist at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is Maine's leading nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting the environment on behalf of our nearly 24,000 supporters statewide and beyond. I am here today to testify in support of LD 14, An Act to Provide Indigenous Peoples Free Access to State Parks.

This bill is identical to LD 25, which was introduced in the 131st Maine Legislature. LD 25 received broad support from the public, nonprofit groups, and the Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry despite the minor fiscal impact to the General Fund through lost revenue. As a result of this support, the bill received a unanimous Ought to Pass as Amended vote by this committee and then sailed through both the House and Senate. The bill only failed to be enacted because it was held by the Governor upon the conclusion of the legislative session. We, like many others, believe this bill deserves a second chance to become law.

As an environmental advocacy organization, NRCM is committed to protecting, restoring, and conserving Maine's environment. We conduct our work on the unceded lands of the Penobscot Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe, Mi'kmaq Nation, and Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians, who have been stewarding the lands and waters that we now call Maine for generations. After a long history of broken treaties, forced relocation, and genocide dating back to the first colonial settlements in New England, the time to correct previous injustices is far overdue.

In the 66 years since NRCM was founded, we've worked closely with Wabanaki Nations on key environmental issues such as fish passage and toxic contaminants in our waterways. We recognize the invaluable role that Wabanaki knowledge-keepers have in protecting the woods, waters, and wildlife of Maine. For this reason and to correct the wrongdoings of the past, we are committed to actively using our voices, resources, and power to support the Wabanaki Nations in their pursuit of sovereignty.

Although providing free access to state parks may only be a small step relative to the magnitude of the injustices of the past, it is an important one given the strong physical, cultural, and spiritual connection that the Wabanaki people have to these lands. We should continue to remove barriers that may be preventing Tribal members in Maine from accessing the land that was unjustly taken from them as this bill does.

For these reasons, we strongly urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 14. Thank you for your time and consideration.