

Testimony In Support of LD 395 & LD 785
Graham Platner, Sullivan

Chairs Carney and Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Graham Platner. I am an oyster farmer from Sullivan, Maine and a candidate for United States Senate. I am here in solidarity with the Wabanaki Nations to testify in strong support of **LD 395 (An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations)** and **LD 785 (An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendation of the Task Force on the Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act)**, both sponsored by Senator Rachel Talbot Ross.

Since the passage of the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act 46 years ago, Maine tribes have been denied the sovereign rights afforded to the other 570 federally-recognized tribes in the United States. A study¹ published in December 2022 details the harms of the Settlement Act to the Wabanaki Nations:

“Unique to Maine, the federal Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act of 1980 (MICSA) empowers the state government to block the applicability of federal Indian policy in Maine. As a result, the development of the Wabanaki Nations’ economies and governmental capacities have been stunted. Today, all four of the tribes in Maine ... are stark economic underperformers relative to the other tribes in the Lower 48 states.”

According to the Wabanaki Alliance, since 1989, tribal income outside of Maine has grown by 61%. Wabanaki income has grown only 9%. Child poverty in Wabanaki communities is three to five times higher than the rest of the state. These are children, families, and communities who bear the brunt of an injustice perpetrated in 1980 by Maine’s state government and perpetuated today by a powerful few—including Governor Janet Mills, who has fought against tribal self-determination her entire career.

Maine tribes are demanding respect, fairness, and meaningful self-determination. Marginal changes to state programs are not enough. Structural injustices demand structural remedies. If tribal rights can be altered at the whim of the State, they can hardly be characterized as rights at all. Anything short of sovereignty is subjugation. We must pass LD 785.

We must also pass LD 395 to grant Maine’s tribes access to federal beneficial laws that apply to all other federally-recognized tribes. If elected to the United States Senate, I will strongly support federal legislation to provide the same. I look forward to working with the many Maine legislators who have championed this effort.

The United States is about to turn 250 years old. Our nation’s history is defined by a tension between what it is, and what it strives to be. This tension is glaringly clear in our shameful history of oppressing Native peoples while espousing principles of freedom, liberty, justice, and equality. For the state of Maine to continue denying the Wabanaki Nations—who have called Maine home for millennia—their inherent sovereignty, political dignity, and self-determination is unconscionable. We have an opportunity to right the injustices of the past, and it is an opportunity we must take.

I respectfully ask that you vote in favor of LD 395 and LD 785. Thank you.

¹ Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine. Harvard University Press. Kalt, Medford & Taylor. 2022.