



# Permanent Commission RACIAL, INDIGENOUS & TRIBAL POPULATIONS

**Testimony in 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 Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the  
Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act***

February 19, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Sam Zuckerman. I am the Policy Coordinator of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations. I am here today on behalf of the Permanent Commission's Policy Committee to testify in support of both LD 395, "An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations" and LD 785, "An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act."

The Permanent Commission strongly supports legislation that recognizes the inherent rights of Wabanaki Nations. For too long, our tribal neighbors have been denied the rights and protections that every other federally recognized Indigenous community in our country has access to. These rights and protections are the bare minimum required to begin righting the wrongs that have been enacted on the Indigenous people of this land through state sanctioned theft and violence.<sup>1</sup> Maine currently stands decades behind the rest of the country when it comes to respecting the will of its Indigenous communities, as Maine currently maintains a system that seeks to keep the Wabanaki Nations subservient to the state.<sup>2</sup> This treatment is not only morally reprehensible, it also ultimately harms all of us because we are all connected and when our Indigenous neighbors thrive, so do the communities and natural environments around

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<sup>1</sup> Myall, James. Maine Center for Economic Policy. Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine (2025). Page 4-11. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sovereignty-Starts-Here.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Myall, James. Maine Center for Economic Policy. Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine (2025). Page 12. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sovereignty-Starts-Here.pdf>

them. And it is long past time to implement the recommendations from the bipartisan Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act – these updates were first recommended in 2020 and there is no reason to wait any longer.

These two bills would allow tribes to resume stewardship of the lands and waters that they have historically cared for and relied on for vital resources. It would allow them to pursue economic development that is currently stifled by a hostile and inflexible state government. And it would allow them to access federal funding. The potential benefits for sovereignty can be seen in the prosperity experienced by other tribes who do have access to all of these rights and resources: tribes in Arizona, Washington, Wisconsin, and Montana all operate successful business enterprises that benefit both the tribes and the communities surrounding them.<sup>3</sup> A study from Harvard in 2022 found that, between 1989 and 2018, tribes outside of Maine saw an economic growth of 61%, while Wabanaki Nations saw only 9% growth.<sup>4</sup> Rural tribes and the communities around them would benefit most from recognition of tribal sovereignty: in the absence of manufacturing operations, businesses and organizations that have deep roots in and connections to the land itself will create a local economy that is sustainable and invested in the people they serve.<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, however, the most important consideration here is what the communities most affected by these bills are asking of you. And the tribes have been clear – sovereignty is a necessity for them and the legislature should listen to their voices because they are the experts when it comes to knowing what will most benefit the tribes.

Whether through economic growth, the protection of drinking water, or the ability to self-govern, every community deserves the chance to strive towards a better, more equitable tomorrow. By denying Wabanaki Nations the same opportunities afforded to other Indigenous nations in the country, the state perpetuates an ongoing cycle of harm. Respecting Wabanaki Nations' rights to self-determination is a vital step to ending this cycle. Thank you for your time. We urge you to vote in support of these bills. I would be happy to answer any questions.

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<sup>3</sup> Myall, James. Maine Center for Economic Policy. Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine (2025). Page 19. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sovereignty-Starts-Here.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Kalt, Joseph P., Amy Besaw Medford & Jonathan B. Taylor, "Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine." The Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development. Dec 2022.

<sup>5</sup> Myall, James. Maine Center for Economic Policy. Sovereignty Starts Here: Land, Economy, and Tribal Rights in Maine (2025). Page 17. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Sovereignty-Starts-Here.pdf>