

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Megan Smith, and I am here today on behalf of Maine People's Alliance in strong support of LD 395.

Maine People's Alliance is a statewide grassroots organization working to build a more just, equitable, and thriving Maine. We support LD 395 because it would modernize the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act and ensure that the Wabanaki Nations are treated the same as the other 570-plus federally recognized tribes across the United States. For more than 40 years, the Wabanaki Nations have been uniquely excluded from federal laws and programs unless they are explicitly written in. LD 395 would correct this inequity and allow the Wabanaki Nations to benefit from federal laws intended to support tribal self-determination, economic development, and community well-being.

I am also here today as a tribal member of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. I was born in 1981, just one year after the Settlement Act was passed, and I have lived my entire life with the consequences of that law.

Growing up, I often heard my elders talk about the hardships our tribe faced because of the Settlement Act, especially when it came to economic development and opportunities that other tribes were able to pursue. They spoke about how decisions made years ago, now decades ago continued to limit what our communities could build, invest in, and achieve. At the time, I didn't fully understand the scope of those barriers. But as I grew older, I began to see how those limitations were still shaping our reality.

For more than 40 years, the Settlement Act has required that the Wabanaki Nations be explicitly written into federal law in order to benefit from it. As a result, the Wabanaki Nations have been excluded from at least 151 federal laws, including programs that support housing, infrastructure, economic development, public health, and public safety. These programs have helped other tribal nations across the country strengthen their communities, create jobs, and build long-term stability. But here in Maine, those same opportunities have too often been out of reach.

This has had lasting impacts, not just economically, but across generations. It has meant fewer opportunities for tribal communities to grow, fewer tools to support community development, and fewer pathways to build long-term prosperity.

LD 395 would finally modernize the Settlement Act and remove these structural barriers. This bill does not give the Wabanaki Nations special treatment. It simply ensures that they are treated equally under federal law and have the same opportunity to benefit from federal programs as every other federally recognized tribe.

Maine People's Alliance stands in solidarity with the Wabanaki Nations, and I urge you to pass LD 395. It is time to correct decades of inequity and ensure that future generations do not continue to face the same barriers my elders spoke about and that our communities continue to live with today.

Thank you for your time and consideration.