

Testimony in Support of LD 395 An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations by Cassandra Wright, Parishioner & Member of the Penobscot Nation Neighbors Committee, St. James' Episcopal Church, Old Town, presented to the Judiciary Committee, 2/19/26

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee; my name is Cassandra Wright. I live in Orono, grew up in Old Town, and testify today on behalf of St. James' Episcopal Church, Old Town, in support of LD 395 An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations

St. James' Episcopal Church sits within sight of the Penobscot River in Old Town, and it is just a short walk down Main Street to the bridge leading to Indian Island. Being anchored in the Great Commandment to love thy neighbor, much of the church's outreach effort has supported our Penobscot neighbors with school supplies, holiday meals, heating oil and food pantry supplies. At a special meeting of the congregation on September 28, 2025, parishioners voted unanimously to join the Wabanaki Alliance. Shortly thereafter St. James' created the Penobscot Nation Neighbors Committee. Though we have not yet adopted an official mission for the new committee, its focus is to support Wabanaki sovereignty and self-determination. We hope to find further ways to extend our friendship and support to these neighbors.

The 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act resolved claims by the Passamaquoddy, Penobscot, and Maliseet regarding two-thirds of Maine's land. It allowed two of the tribes, the Passamaquoddy Tribe and Penobscot Nation, to repurchase 150,000 acres of their former lands, but it significantly restricted their sovereignty by subjecting them to state jurisdiction, leading to ongoing disputes over tribal rights. Because Maine insisted that the unique jurisdictional relationship between it and the Wabanaki Nations not be affected by federal legislation, provisions in the Federal Act block Wabanaki Nations from having access to federal beneficial acts unless specifically cited in the legislation. This exclusion has caused the Wabanaki to experience lower economic growth (9% per capita income) compared to other US tribes (61% growth) from 1989 to 2020. * Not only have the Wabanaki Peoples suffered but also surrounding Maine communities have been deprived of the economic stimulus unencumbered Wabanaki Nations might generate if not thwarted by this greatly unjust exclusion.

We do perceive a new climate in Wabanaki-State of Maine relations. The mascots are gone. Maine is no longer celebrating the dominance and genocide created by Columbus. It is important to note that the repudiation of the Doctrine of Discovery began at St. James' Church. The repudiation spread to the Diocese of Maine, the national church, and other religious bodies worldwide. There is more to accomplish however. We must stop excluding Wabanaki Nations from federal benefits available to every other federally recognized tribe. The passage of overdue LD 395 would continue the progress that our Indigenous neighbors deserve. St. James' Episcopal Church urges the Judiciary Committee to report this bill ought to pass.

** Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine*, Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, December 2022