



Testimony of Marpheen Chann for Khmer Maine before the
Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary

IN SUPPORT OF L.D. 395

An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations
on February 19, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Marpheen Chann, and I am the Executive Director of Khmer Maine, a community organization that serves Maine's Cambodian and Southeast Asian communities, of which there are more than 10,000 who call Maine home.

I come before you today as someone whose community knows, in its bones, what it means to be stripped of land, rights, and the protections of law. The Cambodian community of Maine is composed largely of survivors and descendants of the Khmer Rouge genocide—people who fled a regime that dismantled every institution meant to protect them and left them to rebuild their lives from nothing. That history shapes how we see the world, and it shapes why we are here today.

The Wabanaki Nations have been here since time immemorial—long before Maine was a state, long before the federal government existed. And yet, under the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act, they remain the only federally recognized tribes in the United States that must be explicitly written into every federal law to benefit from it. More than 570 other federally recognized tribes benefit automatically from federal Indian law. The Wabanaki Nations do not. In the past 40 years, at least 151 federal laws have passed them by. This is not an oversight. It is a structural exclusion—and L.D. 395 would fix it.

The consequences of this exclusion are real and severe. The Stafford Act, which provides emergency funds for natural disasters and public health crises, has been unavailable to the Wabanaki Nations—including resources to fight the opioid epidemic that has devastated tribal communities. The Indian Health Care Improvement Act, which helps tribal governments recruit licensed medical professionals to underserved rural areas, has been blocked from applying to Maine's tribes. The Violence Against Women Act provisions that allow tribes to prosecute non-tribal individuals for domestic violence were denied for years, requiring separate legislative negotiations to implement. Federal environmental laws—the

Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act—that would allow the Wabanaki Nations to protect their own lands and waterways have been kept out of reach.

At Khmer Maine, we work every day to ensure that our community members can access the health care, food security, civic engagement, and cultural resources they need to thrive. We know what it means to navigate systems that were not built with you in mind—and we know what it means when those systems are finally changed to include you. Inclusion is not charity. It is justice. L.D. 395 is not asking for special treatment for the Wabanaki Nations. It is asking that they be treated the same as every other federally recognized tribe in the country.

This bill is also a practical investment in Maine. A 2022 analysis by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development found that removing the jurisdictional barriers in the Settlement Act would create thousands of jobs and generate hundreds of millions of dollars in economic activity—not just for tribal nations, but for rural Maine communities that are struggling. Economic justice and community wellbeing are not in competition. They reinforce one another.

Maine's Cambodian and Southeast Asian communities came to this state as refugees, seeking safety and the opportunity to build new lives. The Wabanaki Nations did not come here—they were here first, and they have never left. We share a Maine, and we share a stake in whether this state lives up to its values. Passing L.D. 395 is one meaningful step toward a Maine where every community—whether it arrived generations ago or is still newly rooted—can flourish on equal footing.

I urge this committee to support L.D. 395. The Wabanaki Nations have waited long enough.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marpheen Chann". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "M" and a long, sweeping underline.

Marpheen Chann

Executive Director, Khmer Maine

Portland, Maine