

**Testimony in Support of LD 395, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations**

**February 19, 2026**

**To:** Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

**From:** Bryan Wentzell, Portland, ME

Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Bryan Wentzell and I live in Portland, Maine. I am here to testify in support of LD 395.

I have been working in land conservation in Maine for 20+ years from Portland to Moosehead Lake and in the last 5 years have worked in timber investment and sustainable forest management. For the last 10 years I have learned from and worked alongside Wabanaki leaders to address longstanding inequities around land access and sovereignty. I fully support LD 395 as one critical step in addressing the State's problematic relationship and treatment of Wabanaki Tribal Nations.

I strongly believe that we are all better off when Wabanaki sovereignty is fully recognized and more land is in Wabanaki stewardship - better off in our understanding of land relationship, better in our natural resource management, better off economically, and better off as communities.

Four decades after their passage, the Settlement Acts are widely regarded as a failure. The laws have been applied unequally among the Wabanaki Nations, no tribe has been able to buy back the full amount of land, and legal disputes persist. The state's interpretation of the Settlement Acts has also resulted in a downgrading of the Wabanaki Nations' ability to benefit automatically from federal laws created for Indian Country. They are the only federally recognized tribes to be treated in this way.

As a direct result of the Settlement Acts, the Wabanaki Nations and the State of Maine have been unable to benefit from more than 150 federal laws passed since 1980, missing out on important opportunities in economic development, health care, housing, environmental protections, disaster response, and development of tribal government services.

The Legislature established the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act (MICSA) in 2019 and in 2020 that Task Force produced **consensus** recommendations to amend MICSA. This bill is a direct result of those recommendations. But here we are in 2026 (again) asking for the legislature to make these bi-partisan common-sense changes to correct something that should have been done a long time ago.

By passing LD 395 this committee can help put Wabanaki Tribes on level footing with the other 570 federally recognized tribes and take a broadly-supported step in the right direction that benefits all Mainers.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Sincerely,

Bryan Wentzell