



MAINE FARMLAND TRUST

**Testimony of Abby Farnham, Assistant Director of Policy & Research, Maine Farmland Trust,
to the 132nd Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
February 19, 2026**

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Abby Farnham and I am the Assistant Director of Policy & Research at Maine Farmland Trust (MFT). I am providing testimony on behalf of MFT in support of LD 395—*An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations*.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Our goals are to keep agricultural lands working and help farmers and their communities thrive. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect farmland in every county in Maine, amounting to over 58,000 acres across 395 farms. Our Farm Network includes more than 550 farms that have participated in MFT's programming either through an agricultural easement or through one of our other areas of work. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, and Policy and Research.

Equitable access to land and the ability to produce food as well as fair distribution of and access to available resources are key to the future of farming in Maine. LD 395 amends the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act and the Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement Act so that the Wabanaki Nations can benefit from most existing and future federal laws and funding resources that apply to the more than 570 other federally recognized tribes. This bill is based on consensus recommendations from a bipartisan task force convened by the Maine Legislature to recommend changes to the 1980 Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act (MICSA). Currently under the Settlement Acts, when Congress passes federal legislation for tribes nationwide, Wabanaki tribes must be explicitly written into each federal law to benefit from it. A report by the bipartisan Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims that was established by the Maine Legislature found that the exclusion requirement that this bill aims to address has resulted in the Wabanaki Nations being blocked from 151 federal laws since the passing of the Settlement Acts. The Wabanaki Nations are the only federally recognized tribes to be treated in this way.

In addition to our belief that ensuring access to federal laws and funding resources is a matter of fairness and equity for Wabanaki Nations, MFT supports LD 395 based on our understanding that the Wabanaki Nations' ability to thrive economically will have positive impacts that extend to rural communities across Maine, including farming communities. A 2022 report prepared by the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development makes clear that the restrictions imposed by MICSA have inhibited the Wabanaki Nations from achieving greater economic growth and being the driver of economic development for their communities and surrounding regions, as has been experienced by the other 570 federal tribes over the past 40 years which have had full

access to federal policies of self-determination.¹ This report estimates that restoring self-governance capabilities for the Wabanaki Nations would result in the direct and indirect addition of more than 2,700 new jobs and an estimated \$330 million each year to Maine’s GDP – with the benefits of this growth concentrated in rural portions of the state including Aroostook, Penobscot, and Washington counties.²

Farms are drivers of local economic activity in rural areas and in turn are more successful when the communities and regions in which they are located have robust and resilient local economies. Ensuring access to federal self-determination policies and funding programs for the Wabanaki Nations would strengthen the capacity of the Tribes in Maine to create greater economic opportunities for the Tribes as well as surrounding non-tribal communities of rural Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to voice our support for this important effort.

¹ Kalt, J. P., Medford, A. B., and Taylor, J. B., Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, *Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine*, p. 54 (Dec 2022), available at: <https://ash.harvard.edu/publications/economic-and-social-impacts-restrictions-applicability-federal-indian-policies>.

² Kalt, J. P., Medford, A. B., and Taylor, J. B., Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard Kennedy School, Harvard University, *Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine*, p. 40-41 (Dec 2022), available at: <https://ash.harvard.edu/publications/economic-and-social-impacts-restrictions-applicability-federal-indian-policies>.