

February 19, 2026  
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***Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary***

***RE: LD 395 An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations***

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Karen Blakelock, and I work for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify in **support of LD 395**, An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations.

The Nature Conservancy is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. We have been working in Maine for more than 60 years protecting land, restoring rivers and streams, rebuilding groundfish populations in the Gulf of Maine, and developing innovative solutions to address climate change. We are also part of a global organization active in all 50 of the United States and across the world in over 70 countries.

Too often when it comes to the decisions that affect their lands, waters, and livelihoods, Indigenous Peoples have been denied the opportunity to participate in meaningful ways, resulting in the exclusion of important rights-holders from decision-making processes and in management approaches that do not consider the lessons and solutions offered by Indigenous Ecological Knowledge. As an organization committed to creating a future of healthy lands, waters, and communities, we believe that one of the most effective and enduring actions we can take is to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' voices, choices, and actions in natural resource stewardship. This is a major focus of TNC's work around the world.

Here in Maine, we continue to learn about the historical and ongoing injustices faced by the Wabanaki Tribes. We acknowledge the urgency of addressing these injustices and believe that LD 395 is necessary as it puts the Wabanaki Nations on equal footing with all other federally recognized tribes. At TNC, we know the importance of Indigenous led environmental stewardship, and that Indigenous self-determination is the foundation for lasting, quality stewardship outcomes.

We believe LD 395 is a necessary step in supporting the voice, choice, and action of the Wabanaki Nations. Ultimately, The Nature Conservancy's vision of a world where both people and nature thrive is not possible without justice and equity for all people.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in **support of LD 395**. I am happy to answer any questions now or in the future.