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STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT
OF THE
SECRETARY OF STATE

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State

Testifying in Favor of L.D. 395 "An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations " and LD 785 "An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act"

February 19, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Shenna Bellows, and I serve as Maine's Secretary of State, the constitutional keeper of all state records, and I oversee the Maine State Archives. I am here to share my support for LD 785, "An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act" and LD 395 "An Act to Restore Access to Federal Laws Beneficial to the Wabanaki Nations."

As Secretary of State, I oversee the Maine State Archives which serves as the records holding institution for state government. An important and significant collect held and preserved by the Archives is the records of the Maine Land Office and the various Land Agents for the State through the state's Executive Council. These extensive records of maps, surveys, and correspondence document Maine's long history of controlling Wabanaki inhabited land and managing its use, often without the consent of the tribal communities living there. Section 5 of the LD 785 refers directly to these records held at the Maine State Archives.

Native Americans have inhabited this region now called Maine for thousands of years, and since the arrival of European settlers, they have fought for survival, facing the loss of their land and livelihoods as settlers exploited natural resources such as timber and fish. Our records and our history show this.

LD 785 is an opportunity to correct the record, to allow for continued Wabanaki ownership and control of their own lands. I am confident our records and our government can support this effort.

Finally, as Secretary of State I look forward to fulfilling the obligations of this office under Title 3 §601 to ensure smooth communication between the State and tribal leadership when LD 785 and LD 395 pass.

Thank you and I would be happy to take any of the committee's questions.