

Testimony in Support of LD 785, An Act to Advance Self-determination for 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 785.

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.

For example, a 2022 report¹ projected that tribal self-government would add \$330 million annually to Maine's GDP, create 2,700+ jobs (more than half filled by non-tribal rural Mainers), and generate \$39 million yearly in state and local tax revenue. When the Wabanaki thrive, Maine thrives.

In addition, the politicians who drafted the 1980 Settlement Act called it a "living document" meant to be updated. The law itself allows Maine, the Passamaquoddy Tribe, and Penobscot Nation to amend it. After more than 40 years of harm, it is time to modernize this broken deal.

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 785 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

⁷ Economic and Social Impacts of Restrictions on the Applicability of Federal Indian Policies to the Wabanaki Nations in Maine by Joseph P. Kalt, Amy Besaw Medford, and Jonathan B. Taylor December 2022 THE HARVARD PROJECT ON AMERICAN INDIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT