



**Testimony in Support of LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the
Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act**

Before the Committee on Judiciary

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Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Luke Frankel, and I am the Woods, Waters, & Wildlife Director at the Natural Resources Council of Maine (NRCM). NRCM is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization dedicated to protecting, restoring, and conserving Maine's environment, now and for future generations. On behalf of our nearly 20,000 members and supporters, I am here to testify in support of LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.

For more than 65 years, NRCM has worked to safeguard the woods, waters, and wildlife across what we now call Maine. Through this work, we recognize and honor the Penobscot Nation, Passamaquoddy Tribe, Mi'kmaq Nation, and Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians who have stewarded these lands for time immemorial. It is well past time for the State of Maine to recognize the inherent sovereignty of Wabanaki people and restore their full rights to self-determination.

We are proud to have worked with the Wabanaki Nations on many important environmental initiatives over many years. These include efforts to restore fish passage on the Penobscot and Kennebec Rivers; a campaign to oppose a poorly planned mine in the Katahdin region that would have threatened water quality on tribal land; multiple initiatives to stop the flow of out-of-state waste into Maine; and more recently, an effort to provide Wabanaki representation on the Land Use Planning Commission (LUPC)—the planning and zoning authority for Maine's 10.4 million acres of Unorganized Territories.

We are deeply grateful to assist the Wabanaki Nations in their efforts to protect the forests, waterways, and wildlife that are central to their culture and sustenance practices. However, despite the environmental progress that has been made, it remains true that the federally recognized tribes in Maine have limited regulatory authority over the natural resources that sustain them.

By enacting several of the consensus recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act, LD 785 would restore the exclusive authority of the Tribes in Maine to regulate natural resources on their lands. This will allow the Wabanaki people to continue stewarding the environment through sustainable ecological practices in line with their culture, as they have done for millennia.

This environmental aspect of LD 785 is just one part of a much larger picture. Recognizing the inherent sovereignty of Wabanaki people is about fairness, justice, and respect. After a long history of broken treaties, forced relocation, and genocide dating back to the first colonial settlements in New England, the time to correct previous injustices is long overdue. By restoring full sovereignty to the Wabanaki Nations, as this bill would do, this Committee can take a critical step forward toward correcting the wrongdoings of the past.

As a proud member of the Wabanaki Alliance, NRCM is committed to actively using our voices, resources, and power to support our Wabanaki partners in their pursuit of sovereignty. To help build a Maine that is more just and to ensure that our natural resources can be stewarded as they have for millennia, we urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 785. Thank you for your time and consideration.