

Feb. 18, 2026

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

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Luke Sekera-Flanders, I am a resident of Bangor, and speaking on behalf of Community Water Justice, a network of impacted communities across Maine building awareness and grassroots power to protect the rights of water for people, the environment, and for future generations.

Four years ago, I spoke before this committee in support of LD 1626, a predecessor of the bill before you today. This committee heard from over 1,500 of us speaking and writing in defense of Tribal Sovereignty. Fundamentally, nothing has changed. The moral necessity of this bill is as urgent today as when these recommendations were written 7 years ago, and the burdens resulting from the Settlement Act certainly haven't gone anywhere.

Indeed, there has been historic progress in recent years toward building new relations between the State of Maine and Wabanaki nations, but looking through our history and considering the depths of poverty and dispossession that the state has subjected Wabanaki peoples to, one must recognize that incremental improvements and reforms to the Settlement Act do not constitute a resolution of the core tension at hand, which is that the state of Maine has entrapped Wabanaki Tribes in a fundamentally unfair legal framework that denies their inherent sovereign rights as Tribal Nations.

Toward the end of the 2022 Legislative session, before offering an opening prayer in the Senate chamber, then-Vice Chief Darrell Newell of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Motahkomikuk said that "tribal-state relations are broken and irreparable until [the state] recognizes the sacred, inherent sovereign rights of the Wabanaki."

You'll see many youth in this room today. We're here because we've studied our history and are determined to end the state's paternalism toward Wabanaki people. This is a defining issue for our generation and a determining issue that will shape who we support in future elections. Allowing a status quo that places Tribal children at poverty rates three to five times higher than the state average to continue is a stain on the reputation and legacy of the State of Maine and its leadership.

This struggle has spanned generations. Despite genocide and immeasurable loss, Wabanaki people are still here, building incredible futures for their communities. The question for this committee is whether these futures will continue to be built despite the State of Maine, or whether this will be done in partnership and collaboration moving forward.

Today is my first time in this Statehouse since Representative Jeffrey Evangelos passed on. I learned a lot about integrity, solidarity and friendship from my conversations with him and observing his leadership and passionate support of Tribal Sovereignty.

As it has in the past, I am hopeful that this committee will advance these recommendations and stand on the right side of history. I believe that, to quote the late representative Evangelos' testimony to this committee regarding tribal sovereignty, "something wonderful is about to happen."

Thank you,

Luke Sekera-Flanders,
Community Water Justice