

To: Committee on Judiciary

From: Nina Mitchell

Date: Thursday, February 19th, 2026

Re: 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, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Nina Mitchell, I am a resident of Orono, and I am a student at Orono High School and a Rural Youth Organizer for JustME for JustUS. I am writing 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.

At the beginning of my sophomore year, I had a teacher who assigned us a mini research project on Wabanaki sovereignty, which first introduced me to the issue. This education didn't come until I was 15 years old. Later in the year, I got invited to join a Wabanaki Sovereignty Legislative Team, a small group of students who researched Wabanaki sovereignty, came to the statehouse, and lobbied for Wabanaki history education. I was one of the only students who understood this issue coming into the project. We all grew up in Maine, we went to school in Maine, and somehow this had never been part of the conversation. That gap in my knowledge told me something. If a kid who grew up here didn't know, something was wrong with how Maine has been treating this issue.

I recently held a testimony writing party at my school for this bill. Only four students showed up, and almost all of them already knew about the issue. That told me something too. The kids who care are here. There just aren't enough of them yet, because Maine hasn't given them the education to know why they should.

Because the truth is, Maine structured the 1980 Indian Claims Settlement Act to override federal tribal law, leaving the Wabanaki Nations without a say over their own land. No other state does this. For over 40 years, these restrictions have blocked the Wabanaki Nations from accessing federal self-determination policies that have helped 574 other tribes across the country. Harvard researchers project that tribal self-government would add \$330 million to Maine's GDP annually, create over 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, rural Maine thrives.

For all the above reasons, I urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 785: An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.

Sincerely,

Nina Mitchell