

To: Committee on Judiciary

From: Akouvi Komedja

Date: February 19, 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 Committee on Judiciary. My name is Akouvi Komedja, I am a resident of Orono, and I am a high school student and a rural youth organizer for Just Me for Just Us, a rural youth nonprofit. 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."

When I was in seventh grade, I was asked to join a meeting and share what I'd been taught, as a student, about Wabanaki studies. I am sad to say that my answers were short and scarce. My own experience was a confirmation to my school's educators of something they already knew: Wabanaki studies were significantly lacking in our school's curriculum. Following this meeting, which was a wake-up call for me, I took it upon myself to learn more about Wabanaki culture and history in our state. I learned about the Wabanaki nations in our state, and their deeply rooted, historical connection to Maine's land and water. But I also learned how, through the 1980 Indian Claims Settlement Act, Maine has robbed the Wabanaki nations of their sovereignty for over 40 years, being the only state in the country that blocks Wabanaki nations from accessing federal programs and limits their self-governance.

I hope that we all can agree that the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, and Maliseet nations of our Maine have persevered through many years of unjust treatment. But these tribes

have also made endless contributions to Maine's culture, sustainable stewardship, military, local food systems, and more, helping our state's culture, economy, and workforce to thrive.

The question that I continue to ask is: Why is our state the only one in the nation that continues to deny its native tribes the self-government that they deserve? Wabanaki sovereignty in Maine is *long* overdue, and I hope that our state will finally provide the Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, Mi'kmaq, and Maliseet tribes with the sovereignty and access to federal programs that every other federally recognized tribe in the country has.

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,

Akouvi Komedja