

Testimony of the Council on Indigenous Relations, Episcopal Diocese of
Maine in favor of
LD 785, "An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on
Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement.'

Submitted for the Public Hearing Before the Maine Legislature's Joint Standing
Committee on Judiciary, February 19th, 2026

Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on
Judiciary, my name is Richard Farnsworth, and I serve as a member of the
Legislative Committee of the Council on Indigenous Relations, Episcopal Diocese
of Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer 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.

The Episcopal Council on Indigenous Relations was formed by resolution of
the Diocesan Convention in 1991. For over 30 years we have lived into our
mission "to deepen our relationship with the Wabanaki of Maine, to stand with the
tribes in the pursuit of justice, to affirm their inherent sovereignty, and to support
the preservation of Native languages and culture."

On October 22, 2022, the 203rd annual convention of the Episcopal Diocese
of Maine reaffirmed its commitment to the sovereignty of the Wabanaki Nations
located within the State of Maine by passing Resolution #1 with an overwhelming
majority.

Resolution #1 -

(1) "urges the 131st Maine Legislature to pass a bill or bills in a form consistent
with the goal of tribal sovereignty and the recommendations of the Task Force on
Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act, and urges the
Governor to sign this bill(s) when it reaches the Governor's desk;"

(2) "urges the members of the Maine Congressional delegation to sponsor, the U.S.
Congress to pass, and the President to sign legislation ensuring that the tribes
located in Maine are covered by federal Indian legislation without the necessity to
state that they are covered in each law that is enacted,"

and

(3) “continues to support the Mi’kmaq Nation as they pursue the process they deem most appropriate to achieve redress of the Aroostook Band of Micmacs Settlement.”

I am testifying today in favor of LD 785, legislation which was held over from the first Session of the 132nd Legislature on June 25, 2025, and entitled “An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement.” The original Task Force was convened by the Legislature in 2019, and ultimately 22 individual recommendations were adopted by consensus. Several of these recommendations have been addressed and enacted independently. The remaining recommendations comprise LD 785.

Taken together in its multiple sections, LD 785 acknowledges the sovereignty of the four federally recognized tribes in Maine and enables them to “enjoy the rights, privileges, powers, duties and immunities” that other federally recognized tribes enjoy (Sections 1, 2).” It renders the tribes immune from suits in the Maine State Courts to the same extent as other federally recognized tribes (Section 18), and grants to the tribes “exclusive jurisdiction over fishing, hunting, trapping and other taking of wildlife...” within tribal territory (Section 23). It grants “authority to the tribes to regulate water resources” within tribal territory (Section 38), and establishes “exclusive authority for tribal law enforcement” on tribal territories and Trust Lands (Section 52).

The Council on Indigenous Relations, Episcopal Diocese of Maine, strongly supports these and the other provisions in LD 785 based on our conviction that simple justice compels these results. The Passamaquoddy, Mi’kmaq, Maliseet and Penobscot Nations have resided in what is now known as Maine since time immemorial, for 10,000 years or more. They were the original settlers of this vast area; their sovereign status was never questioned until well into the 18th century when European settlers undertook a lawless land grab of tribal lands.

Maine’s four federally recognized tribes are the only tribes in the nation whose autonomy and self-government are not honored by their host state. As a result, Maine’s four tribes have been denied access to 151 Congressional enactments since 1980 that provided substantial benefits to all other federally recognized tribes residing in the United States. It took seven years for the State to consent to Maine’s four tribes receiving access to the federal Violence Against Women Act. It is time for these injustices to stop. The State of Maine should no longer treat the four federally recognized tribes as subordinate jurisdictions, having no more autonomy

than a municipal government.

The Council on Indigenous Relations urges an "Ought to Pass" vote on LS 785 when it comes to hearing in the Second Session of the 132nd Legislature.

Respectfully submitted.

Richard Farnsworth, on behalf of
the Council on Indigenous Relations,
Episcopal Diocese of Maine

CC: Senator Rachel Talbot Ross, Co-sponsor, Rep. Billy Bob
Faulkingham, Co-sponsor, Jane Stocco, OPLA Shirley
Hager, MFCPP