

**Testimony before the  
Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary**

L.D. 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on  
Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act

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Senator Talbot Ross, Representative Faulkingham, and distinguished members of the Committee on Judiciary, good afternoon. My name is Paige Loud. I live in Old Town, Maine. I am a social worker, graduate student at the University of Maine, and candidate for the United States House of Representatives in CD2. I am also the first registered citizen of a tribal nation to run for federal office in Maine. I am a proud citizen of the Cherokee Nation and a descendant of survivors of the Trail of Tears. I write today in strong support of LD 785.

For my people, sovereignty is not an abstract concept. It is survival. It is dignity. It is the right to care for our own, protect our land, and shape our future. I have watched the Cherokee Nation grow into a strong and prosperous nation, investing in health care, education, housing, language preservation, and economic opportunity - because it has the authority to govern itself. Sovereignty has allowed the Cherokee people to rebuild, heal, and ensure that future generations inherit strength rather than hardship.

Here in Maine, the Wabanaki Nations have not been afforded the same opportunity. The framework created by the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Act placed unique limitations on tribal self-governance that exist nowhere else in the United States. These restrictions have constrained self-determination, limited opportunities, and contributed to hardships that continue to affect families and children today.

LD 785 aims to correct this inequity. It continues careful, bipartisan work to modernize a relationship that has too often been defined by limitation rather than partnership. This legislation is not about special treatment. It is about fairness. It is about ensuring that the Wabanaki have the same tools that other tribal nations use to build healthy communities and sustainable economies. It is also about healing relationships. For too long, uncertainty and legal conflict have stood where trust and collaboration should exist. Passing LD 785 offers an opportunity to move forward together — as partners, neighbors, and stewards of this shared place.

The Wabanaki peoples have protected the lands and waters of this region for thousands of years. Strengthening their sovereignty strengthens environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and the well-being of rural communities across Maine.

As a descendant of people who endured forced removal, cultural erasure, and generations of hardship, I understand what is at stake when sovereignty is denied. And I have seen what is possible when it is respected. The Cherokee Nation was able to rebuild because sovereignty was honored. The Wabanaki Nations deserve the same opportunity. LD 785 is a step toward dignity, equity, and shared prosperity.

When in federal office, I will prioritize advancing and protecting tribal sovereignty so that all tribal nations are treated equitably under federal law. I hope Maine legislators will join in that commitment today by voting **Ought to Pass** on LD 785 and helping move our state toward a future rooted in justice, respect, and true partnership.

Thank you for your time and consideration.