



**Testimony from Shelley Megquier, Policy & Research Director, Maine Farmland Trust, to the
131st Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry
April 4, 2023**

Greetings Senator Ingwersen, Representative Pluecker, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry. My name is Shelley Megquier and I am the Policy & Research Director at Maine Farmland Trust. I'm writing to offer testimony in support of LD 294 – An Act to Include a Tribal Member in the Baxter State Park Authority.

MFT is a member-powered statewide organization that works to protect farmland, support farmers, and advance the future of farming. Since our founding in 1999, MFT has helped to permanently protect more than 330 farms and keep nearly 60,000 acres of farmland in farming. In 2022 alone, MFT supported 48 farm businesses with workshops, technical assistance, and grants – delivering over 680 hours of technical assistance and \$309,000 in business and seed grants to help businesses grow their profitability. Our main program areas are Farmland Protection, Farmland Access, Stewardship, Farm Business Planning, PFAS Support, Climate Resilience, and Policy and Research.

Baxter State Park is one of Maine's most precious resources. Purchased by Governor Baxter and donated to the State in 1931 under specific terms, Baxter State Park represents one of Maine's first conservation efforts. Yet, the laudable effort also completely neglected to include Katahdin's original caretakers, Maine's Tribal communities, in the Park's governance structure. Katahdin and its surrounding lands form an area of important cultural significance to the Wabanaki peoples. Indigenous communities were custodians of this sacred land long before park boundaries were established. LD 294 ensures that decisions made about the park have formal input from Maine's Tribal community through the inclusion of a fourth individual to the Baxter State Park Authority that represents Maine's Tribal community. MFT fully supports this effort based on the recognition that native people must have a seat at the table in natural resource management decisions.

This legislation recognizes and uplifts the voices and knowledge of Maine's Indigenous people. We support the opportunity to bring Indigenous people into a leadership position in a place with profound and significant cultural importance.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support of LD 294. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.