



To: Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Anna Siegel and Julia St.Clair-Voiers, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: March 12, 2021

Re: Testimony in support of L.D. 453 **An Act To Establish a Permanent Appointment of a Member of the Wabanaki Tribes to the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System**

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Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan, and Members of the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. Our names are Anna Siegel and Julia St.Clair-Voiers and we proudly write as representatives for Maine Youth for Climate Justice (MYCJ), a coalition of over 300 youth from across the state who are fighting for bold climate action and a just transition to a livable future in Maine. At the core of our work is climate justice; we acknowledge that the climate crisis is rooted in systemic failures and forms of oppression, and disproportionately affects marginalized communities. MYCJ centers and uplifts the voices of those who have been historically excluded from climate change discussions, making issues of racial justice core to our mission, and LD 453 **An Act To Establish a Permanent Appointment of a Member of the Wabanaki Tribes to the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System** is an important step toward that goal.

LD 453 ensures that a member of the Wabanaki community always has a seat on the University Of Maine Board Of Trustees. Institutions of higher education like the University of Maine system play an essential role in our state's education system, economy, and Maine's culture and community. With this prominent role comes the responsibility of inclusion and equitable representation of Wabanaki voices. Having representation in decision-making bodies, helps to ensure that the views and concerns of Wabanaki Tribal governments are represented in decisions.

As youth we understand that our generation, and future generations, will experience the most serious impacts of climate change over the course of our lives. And as a diverse movement of youth from across the state, we also know that Black, Indigenous and people of color stand to be most impacted by climate and environmental issues. The climate crisis, the largest policy challenge of our generation, is disproportionately impacting people of color, and will continue

to do so unless we take decisive steps to make our decision-making processes more equitable. Communities on the frontlines of this crisis, most often communities of color, will be increasingly vulnerable as our climate, landscape, and resources drastically change.

Indigenous communities in Maine are already feeling the impacts of climate change acutely. Increasingly erratic flooding and warming waters have begun to fundamentally alter waterways and fish populations that the Penobscot Nation has stewarded since time immemorial. Similar climatic shifts have begun to disrupt Brook Trout fishing grounds for the Aroostook Band of Micmacs as well. As populations of invasive species, such as the Emerald Ash Borer, have expanded with a warming climate, they too have placed increasing pressure on culturally-significant species for the Wabanaki. The mounting effects of climate change on Indigenous communities in Maine demonstrates the need for Wabanaki voices, as prominent stakeholders in all legislative matters, to have integral and effective representation. In this time of a rapidly changing climate, a Wabanaki voice on the University of Maine's board of trustees would be crucial towards moving the University towards more decisive and essential action.

On March 15th, 2021, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland was confirmed by the United States Senate becoming the first Indigenous person to become a Cabinet secretary, a shattered barrier that holds symbolic and practical meaning for decolonizing the government. Making space in political discussions and in positions of power for Indigenous people is a step towards much-needed reparations. Maine's Legislature has the opportunity to take this important step by passing this bill and having a permanent spot for a Wabanaki Tribe member on the Board of Trustees of the University of Maine System. LD 453 is one tangible step to uplifting the unique perspective of our Wabanaki neighbors, which will improve the management of the University of Maine system, but also is an important step for the state to take in bettering relations with the Wabanaki community.

For the above reasons, our coalition, Maine Youth for Climate Justice, urges you to vote ought-to-pass on LD 453.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Anna Siegel and Julia St.Clair-Voiers, Maine Youth for Climate Justice