

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Carmella Bear, I am a member of the Penobscot Nation, and a first year political science student at the University of Maine Orono. I am here today to testify in support of LD 395.

Within my community I participate in an organization called the Penobscot Nation Youth Council. Through PNYC I have been able to attend conferences around the country from San Diego, California, Washington D.C., and Portland, Oregon, with plans to go to Oklahoma City this coming July. At each and every one of these conferences there has been something I have had to explain to other Indigenous youth. Tribes in Maine are different from theirs. Different in the way that there have been over a hundred legislative acts that my community, and other tribal communities in Maine, have been denied access to.

During a conversation about climate change at a tribal youth gathering in Washington D.C., I had to explain to my peers at the table that the Penobscot Nation has no control over the Penobscot river. I had to recount the ambiguities in the Settlement Act of 1980 that allowed the State of Maine to revoke the tribe's right to protect the water. Furthermore, because of the lack of access to federal Indian law, the retention of our rights and sovereignty is even more fragile. This was incredibly confusing to many of the people sitting with me, as they could not understand why something that had been implemented in their states for years, would not be extended to tribes in Maine.

Having to explain the years of legislation Indigenous communities in Maine have been excluded from to Indigenous peers not from Maine is always challenging. How could something that has been proven to work for 570 other tribes, across 34 states, not be something that could work for tribes in Maine? When discussing solutions to problems we see across Indigenous communities, conversations often become a continuous cycle of, "Well can't Wabanaki Tribes do this?" and "No, we aren't included in that legislation."

Alongside the non-Mainer Indigenous youth, I can not fathom that Maine tribes do not have access to these protections and opportunities. There are over 500 tribes in this country that are examples that this legislation helps tribal communities. Wabanaki tribes deserve to have access to federal Indian law. I implore you, as a Penobscot youth, to vote to pass this bill. Thank you for your time.