

Shay Bellas  
South Portland  
LD 785

To the Joint Standing Committee,

I am writing in strong support of LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.

This bill represents thoughtful, deliberate work already undertaken by Maine itself. The Task Force was created to examine how the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act has functioned in practice and to recommend changes where the law has failed to meet its original intent or produced unintended consequences. LD 785 simply asks the Legislature to finish the work it began.

For more than four decades, the Settlement framework has created legal uncertainty, strained relationships, and persistent inequities for the Wabanaki Nations. While some reforms have been enacted, key recommendations of the Task Force remain unimplemented, leaving gaps that continue to limit self-determination, complicate governance, and impede effective collaboration between the State of Maine and the Wabanaki Nations.

LD 785 addresses these gaps in a measured, Maine-specific way.

Importantly, the recommendations advanced in this bill were not developed hastily or unilaterally. They emerged from careful study, dialogue, and bipartisan participation, with the express purpose of improving clarity, fairness, and functionality within the existing settlement framework. Enacting the remaining recommendations honors that process and respects the time, expertise, and good faith invested by all involved.

This bill is not about reopening the Settlement Act wholesale, nor is it about creating instability. On the contrary, LD 785 increases predictability and trust by aligning Maine law more closely with modern realities, current federal policy, and the principles of tribal sovereignty that underpin government-to-government relationships nationwide.

Leaving these recommendations unaddressed perpetuates a system that everyone acknowledges is incomplete. That incompleteness carries real costs in delayed projects, fractured partnerships, avoidable disputes, and missed opportunities for shared progress in areas such as environmental stewardship, economic development, public health, and community wellbeing.

LD 785 offers Maine a chance to move from acknowledgment to action.

By enacting the remaining recommendations of the Task Force, the Legislature can demonstrate its commitment to fairness, good governance, and long-term stability and take another concrete step toward a more equitable and functional relationship with the Wabanaki Nations.

I respectfully urge the Committee and the Legislature to support LD 785.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
Shay Bellas