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Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

RE: LD 785 An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, my name is Karen Blakelock, and I work for The Nature Conservancy in Maine. I appreciate this opportunity to testify **in 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.

The Nature Conservancy is a nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to conserving the lands and waters on which all life depends. We have been working in Maine for 70 years protecting land, restoring rivers and streams, rebuilding groundfish populations in the Gulf of Maine, and developing innovative solutions to address climate change. We are also part of a global organization active in all 50 of the United States and across the world in over 70 countries.

Too often when it comes to the decisions that affect their lands, waters, and livelihoods, Indigenous Peoples have been denied the opportunity to participate in meaningful ways, resulting in the exclusion of important rights-holders from decision-making processes and in management approaches that do not consider the lessons and solutions offered by Indigenous Ecological Knowledge. As an organization committed to creating a future of healthy lands, waters, and communities, we believe that one of the most effective and enduring actions we can take is to strengthen Indigenous Peoples' voices, choices, and actions in natural resource stewardship. This is a major focus of TNC's work around the world.

Here in Maine, we continue to learn about the historical and ongoing injustices faced by the Wabanaki Tribes. We acknowledge the urgency of addressing these injustices, and we value the work of the Maine Indian Land Claims Settlement Task Force in developing a package of recommendations aimed at doing so. Our support for LD 785 is guided by what we have learned from the Tribes, our deeply rooted organizational belief in the value of Indigenous environmental stewardship, and our understanding that Indigenous self-determination is the foundation for lasting, quality stewardship outcomes.

As a land and water conservation organization, we are not in a position to comment on many of the specific recommendations made by the Task Force. However, as a whole, these recommendations represent an important step toward recognizing the rights to self-determination and sovereignty of Wabanaki Nations, which The Nature Conservancy strongly supports. We believe tribal sovereignty is a necessary status for the Wabanaki Nations to achieve

in order for them to participate meaningfully in natural resource management decisions. Ultimately, long-term conservation where both people and nature thrive is not possible without justice and equity for all people.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **support of LD 785**. I am happy to answer any questions.