

## **Testimony to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary**

**To:** Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

**From:** Meredith Bruskin, FNP, 27 Hillside Way, Swanville, Maine 04915

**Re:** Support for LD 785, An Act to Enact the Remaining Recommendations of the Task Force on Changes to the Maine Indian Claims Settlement Implementing Act.

Sen. Carney, Rep. Mooney, and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Meredith Bruskin and I live in Swanville. I am writing in strong and urgent support of LD 785, as I believe it is time for us in the State of Maine to honor the justified request of the Wabanaki Nations to join the 570 other Tribes in our country who have had access to federal policies which have led to direct and recognized benefits for the other federal tribes not shackled by the 1980 MICSA law that is clearly curtailing economic growth of Tribes here in Maine.

The record is clear: as reported from the Harvard Kennedy School in 2022, the average income growth since 1989 for tribes who have full access to federal policies of self-determination has been 61% for tribal citizens not located in Maine, and only 9% for Wabanaki citizens of Maine. Our state's overall growth has been 25%, obviously leaving the Wabanaki peoples far behind. This is a direct result of the Settlement Act, which, hopefully, you are working to remedy. Just in terms of childhood poverty, which all Maine people are determined to address, Maine's overall poverty rate for children while still 15%, is way less than the 2019 U.S.Census data recording the child poverty rates of the Passamaquoddy Tribe at 40%, and the Mi'kmaq Nation with the outrageous high of 77%. We cannot turn away from this appalling record in our state. Your support to pass LD 785 embodying the recommendations of the 2019 Task Force, will be a real step toward dealing with this injustice. This bill is the opportunity to restore full authority and protection of Federal Indian Law as it pertains to federally recognized tribes and nations in the US.

As I know how many supporters are probably doing just what I am, writing to you about one of the most important issues in our state, I will simply add that we all know that already the Wabanaki Nations have been working to protect our environment, and have been examples of how to accomplish sustainable ecological practices for thousands of years, which benefits all Mainers. And their economic growth will clearly also benefit the rural areas in which they live. Everyone will benefit from your recommendation to pass LD 785. And the tens of thousands of us who support Wabanaki self-determination will celebrate that day, and your part in it. It is time. As we all know in our hearts, way past time--thank you, for your attention.

Sincerely, Meredith Bruskin, Swanville, Maine