

Michele Christle  
Frankfort  
LD 395

Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Michele Christle and I live in Frankfort. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 785 and LD 395.

As you know, currently, the Wabanaki Nations are the only federally recognized tribes that must be explicitly written into each federal law to benefit from them, essentially forever attaching them to federal laws that were in place 45 years ago when MICA and the Settlement Act first came about. Federal laws related to federally recognized tribes advance and develop, just as Wabanaki Nations also do and Wabanaki people deserve to have the same standing in the eyes of the federal government as the other 570 federally recognized tribes.

These exclusions have blocked the Wabanaki Nations from benefiting from at least 151 laws that have been passed over the past 45 years—laws that help tribal citizens to access emergency funds for natural disasters and public health crises (including the opioid epidemic), the ability for tribes to arrest and prosecute non-tribal individuals who commit certain domestic violence crimes in tribal communities, as well as authorization for tribes to assume primary regulatory authority for federal environmental programs on their lands.

I am a non-Native writer and have lived on unceded Penobscot land for the past decade. As a newcomer here, I'm committed to deepening my understanding the long history of this place and its reaches into the present and the future through research, observation, work, and friendships. Over the years, I've witnessed countless incidents and heard countless stories that demonstrate exactly why these two bills are so important—for the health and wellbeing and thriving of Wabanaki people; the land, water, and wildlife we all cherish; and, for all of us to thrive, Native and non-Native people alike. Even if all we were to care about is the economy, the fact that these bills would advance economic opportunities both within and beyond Wabanaki communities makes it very easy to understand why these bills have bi-partisan support from people across Maine/Wabanakik who understand that when the Wabanaki thrive, we all thrive.

The government of Maine has existed for roughly 200 years, since Maine became a state in 1820; Wabanaki people have lived in Wabanakik/Maine since time immemorial. And since time immemorial, they have governed themselves and related to this land in balance and accordance with Wabanaki values and lifeways. Their sovereignty is inherent and incontestable. It only remains for the state of Maine to recognize this through law—which can be done in part through LD 785 and LD 395—as well as ongoing relationships and action.

Thank you, Sen. Carney, Rep. Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee for understanding that it's time to recognize Wabanaki Nations' sovereignty through these bills, and that doing so will benefit us all.

Sincerely,  
Michele Christle